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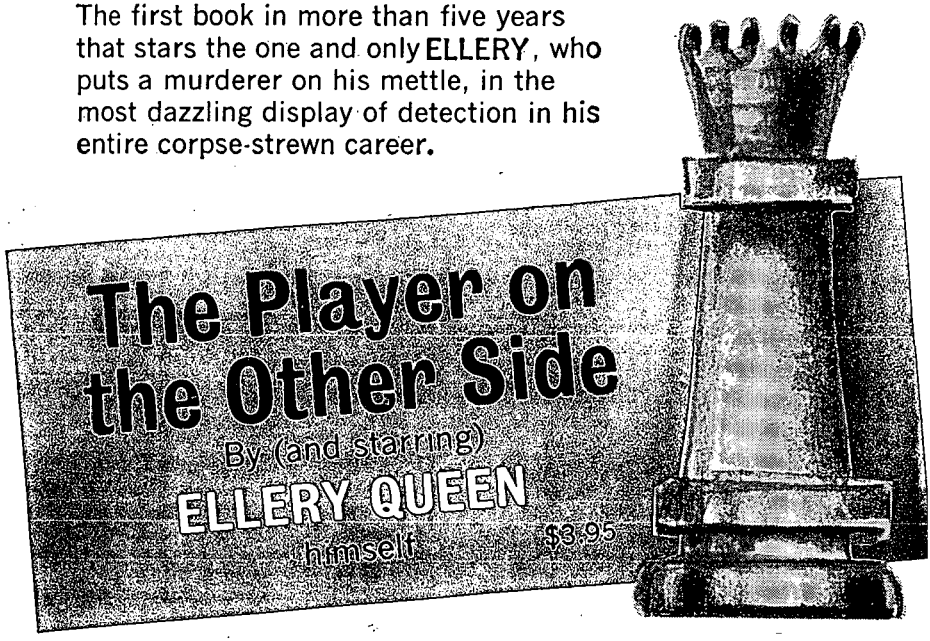

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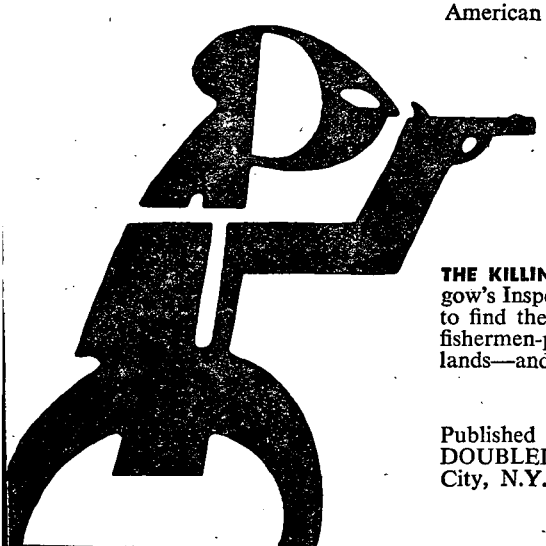

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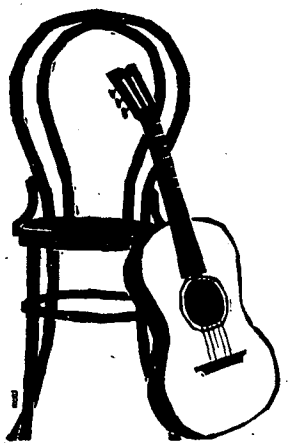

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And in this particular beehive of honey-and-moneymaking you will meet Pierre Chambrun, resident manager, whose skill and suavity as "mine host" is internationally famous—a man with tact and perception whose dark eyes could be those of a Good Samaritan or of a hanging judge—a man who can be charmingly European or bruskly American—a man who will not tolerate the slightest deviation from superb service or established routine, whether it is a minor complaint from a transient guest or—murder . . .

MURDER DE LUXE

by HUGH PENTECOST

BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 4:30 AND 7 A.M. the lobby of the Hotel Beaumont, New York's top luxury hotel, presents a picture which would be unfamiliar to the thousands of rich people who swarm in and out during the other twenty-one and a half hours of the day. It is a little like catching a Hollywood glamor girl preparing for an appearance, in the hands of a masseuse, face smeared with creams, hair done up in pin curls. It is unpardonable to catch her—or the Hotel Beaumont—in such private disarray.

During those secret hours the Beaumont is torn apart and put together again. An army of cleaners, both men and women, bear down on the lobby, the bars, the restaurants, the ballroom, with vacuum cleaners, brass and glass polishing equipment, electrically driven trash wagons, dusters on long poles for cleaning the magnificent chandeliers, old-fashioned buckets and mops. The lights are dimmed, as on a stage after a performance.

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The windows of the swank shops off the lobby, displaying jewels, furs, extravagant women's clothing, and a costly nonsense of toys and small gifts, are dark. The mink-draped mannikins in the store windows stare out blankly at the wall-to-wall green carpeting in the entrance halls and lobby, now being curried like a million-dollar race horse. The whole process is carried out with grim precision, beginning precisely at 4:30 in the morning and ending on the dot of 7:00 A.M., with the Beaumont finally stepping out into public view like the Hollywood star stepping before the cameras—shining, glittering, spotless, and smelling rich . . .

The young woman who arrived at the Beaumont's Fifth Avenue entrance at 4:45 that morning should have known better. The doorman's attitude said as much as he unloaded five suitcases of varying sizes, all new airplane-type luggage, from the girl's taxi. The girl was slim, red-haired, immaculately dressed in a dark-green woolen suit. Her handbag and shoes were dark-brown alligator. Though it was gray-dark outside, the girl wore large black-lensed sunglasses.

She had paid off the taxi before she got out. She swept by the doorman, and carrying one of her suitcases she walked briskly down the long corridor toward the lobby, past the endless mirrors which multiplied her dozens of times, past the glowering cleaning women who resented her intrusion, and up to the reservation desk where Mr. Carl Nevers, night reservation clerk, gave her his pleasant, professional smile with one eyebrow raised in a mild question.

"Do you have a bedroom-living room suite?" the girl asked.

"You have a reservation, Miss?" Nevers asked. His quick eye had caught the naked ring finger on her left hand.

Scarlet lips gave him a hard smile. "Do I need one?" And before Mr. Nevers could protest, she had spun the registration folder around and signed the top card in a bold hand:

Laura Thomas
Hollywood, California

The Beaumont was "home away from home" for most Hollywood celebrities as well as for foreign diplomats, the remnants of the world's royalty, and the special world-wide society of the richer-than-rich.

Carl Nevers knew every regular customer of the Beaumont for the last ten years by name if not by sight. He had never heard of Laura Thomas, either in his job or in the gossip columns which he read daily to keep abreast of stage, screen, and society—or what now passes for society which is really a sort of "celebrity register." He glanced at the rest of the luggage which the doorman had put down in the center of the lobby; he looked at Miss Thomas appraisingly but not discourteously. He had to make the right decision—or Pierre Chambrun, the resident manager, would have him by the ears the next day.

"I think we can take care of you, Miss Thomas," Nevers said suavely. "Suite 14B."

An invisible signal passed between him and the night bell-captain who appeared at Miss Thomas' elbow. The bell-captain took the brass key which Nevers put down on the shining mahogany surface.

"Will you be staying with us long, Miss Thomas?" Nevers asked offhandedly.

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"Three or four days," she said crisply. "I'm not exactly certain."

Johnny Thacker, the bell-captain, slim and wiry, managed four of the five suitcases like a juggler—the girl insisted on carrying one herself. The two disappeared into an elevator.

The Beaumont's face-lifting went on. Carl Nevers stared at the bold signature on the registration card. Laura Thomas. There were so many new young starlets on the coast that it wasn't too odd he hadn't heard of this one. But lone women were a problem at this hour—five o'clock in the morning. Often they didn't belong here and shouldn't be admitted. In these days it was hard to tell a call girl from a duchess. If you turned down a duchess, Chambrun would flay you alive; if you admitted a call girl preparing for an assignation with somebody's husband, Chambrun might easily fire you. The public relations office would know who Laura Thomas of Hollywood was, so Nevers made a note to find out as soon as Miss Barnwell, the P.R. director, arrived at 9:30.

A few minutes later the elevator door slid noiselessly open and Johnny Thacker reappeared. He came over to the desk.

"Who's the babe?" he asked.

"Laura Thomas," Nevers said casually, watching Johnny from beneath lowered lids.

"Who's Laura Thomas?"

"You don't know?" Nevers asked, hiding a sudden qualm.

"Don't know and don't care. Five-buck tip. Hollywood?"

"Of course," Nevers said, feeling suddenly more confident. Call girls are far too practical to give five-dollar tips.

"Something funny," Johnny said.

"Funny?" Nevers's qualms returned.

"She's got something live in one of those suitcases—the one she was carrying herself."

"Live!"

"I could hear it whining," Johnny said.

"In a closed suitcase?"

"Yeah. I mean you don't carry a dog or a cat in a closed suitcase. But she's got something in there—something that whines."

"I'll make a note to have the housekeeper check," Nevers said nervously.

The Beaumont didn't bar dogs or cats—the rich often insist on having their pets with them. There had been more than one monkey, many myna birds, and the current movie Tarzan had appeared with a baby leopard on a chain.

But something live in a closed suitcase? Yes, it would definitely have to be checked.

At seven o'clock one of the operators in the telephone office on the third floor plugged in Room 1208 and rang steadily. There was no answer. She jiggled the button on and off. She glanced at the slip in front of her. It was a list of morning calls—calls to wake people. "7 A.M. Fisher, 1208." She put her finger on the button and held it there.

Mr. Fisher didn't answer.

Obviously Mr. Fisher had wakened under his own power and was already gone from his room. But the Hotel Beaumont never left anything to chance. The operator called the housekeeper on the twelfth floor and asked her to knock on Mr. Fisher's door. The housekeeper checked back a few

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minutes later. Mr. Fisher had hung out his Do Not Disturb sign.

"You'd think he'd cancel his call," the operator said.

She had other seven o'clock calls to make, so she forgot about Mr. Fisher.

At eight o'clock Miss Laura Thomas, wearing a beige wool suit, a mink stole, and her large black sunglasses, and looking as if she'd had a good eight-hours' sleep, emerged from an elevator into the Beaumont lobby and walked out onto the street. A block away she entered a drug store and went to a phone booth in the rear. She dialed a number from memory.

"Hotel Beaumont," a voice said. "Good morning."

"Room eight-o-three, please," Miss Thomas said.

"One moment, please."

Miss Thomas could hear the phone ring, and then a man's voice answered —a cold, hard voice.

"Webber here."

"George? Laura."

"You're not calling from the hotel?"

"Of course not. Corner drug store, as per instructions."

"Everything go smoothly?"

"Like a Swiss watch. The Hollywood plane was on time. I waited for it at the airport and then came in on the bus with the regular passengers. How does it look?"

The man's voice was cold and angry. "Our Mr. Cook is stubborn," he said. "We give him today, and if he still holds out we put an armlock on him. Call me around four o'clock—from outside—and I'll have some answers for you."

"Don't I see you before then, George?" It was a kind of pouting, flirtatious question.

"You don't," the man said without emotion. "Not until this thing is played out. Now go back to the hotel and make like a movie star."

At 8:30 that morning the Beaumont's room service provided breakfast for three in Suite 7H. The room-service waiter was tolerantly aware that Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Cook and their eight-year-old daughter, called Bobbie by her father, were not accustomed to the luxuries and little niceties of the Beaumont's service. Coffee was served in an automatic electric percolater which kept it piping hot and never overbrewed. A small toaster came with the service. Mr. Chambrun, the resident manager, who was a noted gourmet, had been known to say that he would listen to explanations if someone was accused of stealing a five-dollar bill from a guest's bureau, but he would fire anyone who served the blotting-paper type toast familiar to hotel breakfasters.

The child Bobbie had selected a different breakfast each morning of the three they'd been in 7H. The first morning it had been cereal with a sliced banana, a boiled egg, toast, and milk—probably the same kind of breakfast she had at home. The second day she'd experimented with a chicken liver omelette. Today it was creamed chipped beef.

Mrs. Cook stayed with juice, toast, and coffee. Mr. Cook had started with juice, ham and eggs, toast, marmalade, and coffee. The second day he'd gone to a lamb chop. Today it was kidney stew.

The tips were modest, written in on the checks, but this was made up

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for in part by a cheerful, friendly approach to the waiter. Nothing high-hat or phony about the Cooks. Small-town New England was the waiter's expert diagnosis.

On this third morning Mr. Cook didn't seem quite as cordial to the waiter as he had been on the other days. He seemed distracted, hardly aware of the waiter's presence. He looked as though he hadn't slept too well. He was a tall, angular man in his middle or late thirties. Sort of a young Abe Lincoln; the waiter thought. Mrs. Cook, a pretty blonde, seemed worried about her husband and was overgrateful to the waiter. Bobbie ran around the table, lifting the silver covers, giving a shrill cry of dismay when she saw what her father had ordered.

"Daddy! Kidney stew *for breakfast!*"

The waiter gave the little girl a solemn wink and retired.

Bobbie Cook laughed delightedly and sat down hurriedly at her place. "May I begin, Mum?"

"Of course, darling," Anne Cook said. She was watching her husband who was standing by the windows looking down over Central Park. She finally moved over to stand beside him and put her hand on his arm.

"Cliff?"

He seemed to pull himself back from some distant place and looked down at her with a small sad smile. He said. "Today is it, you know."

"I know."

"Would you like to be able to live in a place like this for the rest of your life, Anne?"

"Of course I wouldn't, Cliff."

"Or a house just about anywhere in the whole United States?"

"Cliff, I want you happy."

"The best schools for Bobbie? Fancy clothes? Luxuries?"

"I want you happy," Anne said doggedly. She frowned. "I don't really understand, you know. We're doing fine as things are. If you say 'no' how will that be changed?"

A deep frown creased the man's forehead. "I'm not sure," he said. "Hobbs and his man Webber aren't used to having anyone say 'no.' They play it two ways—Hobbs all charm, Webber all menace. Maybe it's just a game designed to frighten me, maybe they really would bite back. My credit made sticky, distribution made next to impossible. There are ways—plenty of ways."

"If they can make millions out of the patents, Cliff, why can't you? That's what I don't see."

"Capital," Cook said. "They have it and I don't. No matter where I raise it I'll have to cut someone else in. So why not Martin Hobbs?"

"Why not?"

"It's childish, Anne, but I just don't like him. I just don't want to be in business with him. I don't trust him."

"Then say 'no'," she said.

"You're willing to risk it?"

"Of course."

He bent down and kissed her gently on the cheek. "Thanks, baby," he said.

"Stop smooching, you two," their eight-year-old daughter called to them. "Your breakfast is getting cold."

Mr. Pierre Chambrun, resident manager of the Hotel Beaumont, was a small, dark man, stocky in build, with heavy pouches under dark eyes that could turn hard as a hanging

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judge's or unexpectedly twinkle with humor. Chambrun had been in the hotel business for thirty years and had risen to the top of the field. Mr. George Battle, owner of the Beaumont, lived on the French Riviera all year round, presumably counting his money which never came to an end.

Pierre Chambrun ran the Beaumont without interference or even consultation with the owner. He *was* the Beaumont. French by birth, he had come to this country as a small boy, and now he thought like an American. His training in the hotel business had taken him back to Europe; he spoke several languages fluently; he could adopt a Continental manner to suit an occasion but the Beaumont was an American institution and Chambrun kept its atmosphere strictly American.

Chambrun never ate lunch. As resident manager his services were called on most frequently between the hours of eleven and three—people with complaints, people with special problems, members of the staff confronted by one difficulty or another, outside interests using the hotel for parties, fashion shows, special conferences. The arrivals and departures of celebrities, notables, and the just plain rich required his personal attention. Though there were special departments and department heads for handling the intricacies of travel arrangements, publicity tie-ins, and general bowings and scrapings, Chambrun was always close at hand for the emergencies.

He had a gift for delegating authority but he was always ready to take the full responsibility for "touchy" decisions. He could make such decisions on the instant, and after thirty years in the business he could tell himself without vanity that he'd never made a delicate decision which he felt later to have been an error. A few of them had proved wrong or unworkable, but faced with the same facts again he would make the same judgment.

At precisely 9:30 each morning he ate a hearty breakfast in his office on the fourth floor. The office looked more like a gracious living room than a place of business. Chambrun's breakfast consisted of juice or fresh fruit in season, lamb chops or a small steak or sometimes brook trout or a Dover sole, toast in large quantity with sweet butter and strawberry preserves. And coffee—coffee which he went on drinking all day; American coffee for breakfast followed by Turkish coffee, sipped in a demitasse until bedtime. At seven in the evening he ate an elaborate dinner sepecially prepared to meet the requirements of a gourmet's palate.

Chambrun never looked at the mail and memoranda on his desk until he came to his second cup of coffee and his first Egyptian cigarette of the day.

The memoranda from the night staff usually involved familiar problems requiring tact as well as iron discipline. Despite its reputation as the top luxury hotel in America, the Beaumont was confronted with many of the same problems as lesser establishments. There were always the drunks, the dead beats, the call girls—the most expensive in New York, but nonetheless call girls—the endless cantankerous guests, the suicides, the heart attacks suffered by elderly gentlemen in the rooms of young ladies not their wives, the whims of elderly dowagers with far more money than they could count, the oddities like the

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Moslem gentleman who had insisted on having the bed removed from his suite so that he wouldn't be tempted to sleep anywhere else but on the hard parquet floor.

On this particular morning, his breakfast finished, Chambrun sipped his second cup of coffee and inhaled deeply on his cigarette. He glanced at the list of late arrivals. His eyes stopped at the name of Laura Thomas, Hollywood, California. It rang no bells with him.

The note attached to the Thomas card made him smile wryly. His staff was well-trained. They reported any deviations, no matter how absurd. Carl Nevers, the night reservation clerk, had followed routine. "Johnny Thacker reports the lady was carrying something alive in one of her suitcases. He could hear it whining."

Chambrun reached for the phone on his desk and asked to be connected with Mrs. Kniffen, the head housekeeper.

"Yes, Mr. Chambrun?"

Poor Mrs. Kniffen. She always sounded panic-stricken when she got a call from him, Chambrun thought. "Beautiful day, Mrs. Kniffen," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"I trust your family is all well?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Suite 14B, Mrs. Kniffen. It was occupied last night by a young lady named Thomas. Possibly from the world of the motion picture. The night bell-captain reports she was carrying something alive in one of her suitcases. Obviously not an ordinary pet like a dog or a cat. I'm curious, Mrs. Kniffen."

"Yes, sir." Mrs. Kniffen's voice was unsteady. Chambrun could read her like a book. She was remembering the time a box of trained snakes had got loose on the twelfth floor.

"Just an unobtrusive check, Mrs. Kniffen."

"Yes, sir."

"No luggage search. But if you see a water dish or a saucer of milk—something of that sort—"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Kniffen."

As he put down the phone a small green light blinked on his desk. He picked up the phone again to answer his secretary.

"Mr. Martin Hobbs to see you, Mr. Chambrun."

"Thank you, Miss Proctor. Have my breakfast things removed and then show him in."

Chambrun's mind was like a well-organized card index file. In his job he had to know everything he was supposed to know, and a great deal more that he was not supposed to know. He knew the obvious—like which men were cheating on their wives and which wives were cheating on their husbands; he knew which guests were spending more than they could afford; he knew all the gossip about everyone. His staff was, in effect, a highly skilled intelligence service. The mental file-card dealing with Martin Hobbs was ready for use on a split second's notice.

Martin Hobbs, aged 38, handsome, great charm if a little too labored at times. Ten years ago he had been known as "the boy wonder," a young financial wizard from the West Coast, San Francisco's most notable fixture after the Golden Gate Bridge. He'd made a mammoth coup in the stock market that had lifted him to the climate of the fabulously rich. He was

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ostensibly a promoter and organizer of businesses and business mergers. He was said to hold government contracts in the field of rocketry that would run into billions over a period of years. This meant, obviously, important contacts in government as well as business. To be treated with extra courtesy and special attention a all times.

But at the bottom of his mental file-card Pierre Chambrun had appended a cliché: What goes up must come down.

A silent waiter wheeled out the remains of Chambrun's breakfast. Chambrun walked over to the sideboard to set his pot of Turkish coffee brewing, took a fresh cigarette from his silver case, and had just lighted it when Miss Proctor ushered in Martin Hobbs.

"Good morning, Mr. Hobbs," Chambrun said, smiling blandly. "Won't you sit down? How can I serve you?"

The blond Viking in a Madison Avenue charcoal-gray suit, a custom-made shirt, and a tie in regimental stripes, flashed Chambrun a bright smile. The word "mask" appeared suddenly on Chambrun's cranial radar screen.

"I've been so deeply involved in this business merger we're putting through," Hobbs said, "that I've neglected to tell you how perfect the service in your hotel has been and to comment on the extraordinary efficiency of your staff."

"That's always nice to hear," Chambrun said, his hooded eyes studying this famous young man. Something odd here, he thought; something like panic behind that white smile.

"I'd like to impose on you for a rather delicate extra service," Hobbs said.

"We rarely find ourselves unequipped to provide extras, Mr. Hobbs."

"You must deal with the transfer of large sums of cash from your bank to the hotel as a matter of daily routine," Hobbs said.

"We do."

Hobbs reached into his pocket, took out his wallet, and produced a folded check. "I need to have fifty thousand dollars in cash at our meeting today," he said. "Can the people who handle your cash deposits and withdrawals take care of it for me?"

Chambrun made his slight hesitation seem like no hesitation at all. A slow smile began as he glanced at the check. The smile must obviously be completed before he could speak. The check was on a San Francisco bank. It would normally take four or five days to clear. Of course, a quick phone call—

"I can have it for you at eleven thirty," Chambrun said, "if that is in time."

Hobbs's eyes lowered for an instant to his hands. "You will of course vouch for the fact that it is my check and that the money is being delivered to me. If there's any question, a phone call to my bank—"

'Way ahead of you, son, Chambrun thought. "Don't think any more about it, Mr. Hobbs. Do you want the money delivered to your suite or to the conference room?"

"The conference room," Hobbs said. "But I want to be called outside to receive it. Just say there is a message for me. No mention of the money, please."

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"I'll take care of it personally, Mr. Hobbs."

Hobbs turned on his brilliant smile. "I'm most grateful, Mr. Chambrun."

"A pleasure to be of service to you, Mr. Hobbs."

Chambrun watched him go, tapping the check gently against the palm of his hand. Then he went to his phone and picked it up. Miss Proctor responded promptly.

"Call Mr. Frederick Tweddell of the San Francisco Trust at his home, Miss Proctor—person-to-person."

"It's only a quarter past seven in San Francisco, Mr. Chambrun."

"Thank you for reminding me, Miss Proctor."

"You—you still want me to make the call?"

"Please," Chambrun said patiently.

At twenty minutes past ten, New York time, Clifford Cook approached the desk in the Beaumont lobby. Mr. Atterbury, head clerk during the day, greeted him pleasantly.

"It turns out that Mrs. Cook and my daughter and I will be leaving for home tomorrow—after breakfast," Cook said.

"We'll be sorry to see you go, Mr. Cook," Atterbury said automatically. "Can we help in any way with your travel arrangements?"

"We drove here," Cook said. "If you'll notify the garage to have our car delivered at ten o'clock, gassed up and ready for the road?"

"Of course."

"I thought of taking Mrs. Cook to the theater tonight—"

"Our theater ticket bureau is just across the lobby there, sir, next to the newsstand."

Cook turned and headed across the glittering lobby toward the newsstand. Before he reached it he came face to face with an attractive-looking young man. Except for the fact that he was dark he could have been a younger version of Martin Hobbs—charcoal-gray suit, custom-tailored shirt, tie in regimental stripes.

"Morning, Mr. Cook."

Cook pulled himself out of his preoccupation. "Oh—good morning, Stanton."

Young Donald Stanton was the most pleasant of Martin Hobbs's entourage. Cook knew that being pleasant was part of a public relations man's job, but with young Stanton it seemed both natural and genuine. He had spent an hour with Cook two days before, asking him courteously about his background, his education, his politics, his business history. Cook, a little puzzled, had been told that "when, as, and if this merger comes off, sir, it'll be my job to include you in our version of the corporate image." Well, Cook thought grimly, it had been a wasted hour.

"Have you ever been to the zoo in Central Park, sir?" Stanton asked.

"No, but I believe Mrs. Cook took Bobbie there yesterday."

"I have a girl who's mad about it," Stanton said.

"Oh?" Cook said.

Stanton laughed disarmingly. "We are going there this afternoon—if!"

"Oh."

"If the big story isn't going to break today, sir. Off the record, sir—and for God's sake don't tell Mr. Hobbs I asked you—is there likely to be a final decision today? Because if there is—no zoo!"

"I hate to interfere with your excursion, Stanton, but I think a decision today is almost certain."

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Stanton looked sincerely enthusiastic. "Welcome to the family, sir," he said. "I know how pleased Mr. Hobbs will be."

Cook nodded. But Mr. Hobbs wasn't going to be pleased.

Mr. Frederick Tweddell of the San Francisco Trust didn't enjoy being wakened at 7:15 A.M. But when he heard Chambrun's voice he relaxed. Chambrun was a rare person and a very special friend. He had been a highly efficient supply officer under Colonel Tweddell's command in France and Germany the last two years of the war. He had also been Colonel Tweddell's favorite drinking companion.

"Pierre, you old son-of-a-bottle!" Mr. Frederick Tweddell said.

"Son-of-a-bottle yourself," Chambrun said, "and I have a special one reserved for you on your next trip to New York. But at present a small emergency is at hand."

"You never have emergencies," Pierre—I know you, you're always 'way ahead of trouble."

"That's what I'm trying to do now—stay ahead," Chambrun said. "I have a check on my desk in the amount of fifty thousand smackers. It's signed by a customer of yours. He wants folding money for it."

"Fifty thousand in cash!"

"By eleven thirty, our time. Martin Hobbs. Do I cash it?"

Mr. Tweddell's whistle in San Francisco was quite clear in Chambrun's office. "Funny thing," he said. "Hobbs's account here is a personal checking account, not his business account. It just happens I had his folder out yesterday. This is off the record, Pierre."

"I just don't want to be stuck for fifty thousand bucks," Chambrun said. "Off the record, if you say."

"There was a guy in my office yesterday—investigator for one of these Senate subcommittees. He was interested in Hobbs. I couldn't tell him anything or show him anything unless he had a subpoena for our records. But I was curious, so I looked at Hobbs's account after this investigator left. Hobbs has exactly fifty thousand one hundred and four dollars and seven cents in his account. If there are no other checks out, yours will just make it!"

"And if this account is overdrawn?"

"Before yesterday I'd have said the sky's the limit."

"And today?"

"Not the sky, anyway."

"If I refuse him," Chambrun said, "I'll be in receipt of a telephone call from some political big-wig in the next ten minutes threatening to chop off my head for being discourteous to the boy wizard. The next day all of the gossip columns will be laughing at me for not trusting one of America's richest men. It would be like turning down a Rockefeller."

"Why does he want fifty thousand in cash?" Tweddell asked.

Chambrun inhaled deeply on his Egyptian cigarette and then crunched it out in the china ashtray on his desk. "I think he may have to go somewhere in a hurry," he said.

"What makes you think that?"

"My gut aches," Chambrun said.

Tweddell laughed. "That gut ache of yours saved my life about six times, Pierre. Trust it. But seriously, this man has some of the biggest defense contracts in the country. Fifty

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thousand dollars is chicken feed in terms of his general credit."

"But you say the sky's no longer the limit?"

"Look, Pierre, you and I aren't always cautious and careful. We play hunches."

"Hunches based on experience and facts," Chambrun said, his voice hard.

Tweddell chuckled. "So get out your ouija board, chum."

At 10:30 that morning Clifford Cook walked into the small conference room on the mezzanine floor of the Beaumont where for the last three days he had been involved with the Martin Hobbs Enterprises. Present when he arrived, after having bought theater tickets for that evening, were Hobbs, young Donald Stanton, Miss Garth who was Hobbs's pretty secretary and who always left the room when they got down to brass tacks, and, of course, George Webber.

Cook, gawky and angular, his dark hair always in a state of disarray, looked strangely out of place in this gathering. Hobbs beamed at him as he came in and continued to give some instructions to his secretary, who also beamed at Cook as she took down Hobbs's orders on her steno pad. It was apparent to Cook that young Stanton had passed on the word that this was to be D-day, and a least he and Hobbs and the secretary assumed that things were going the way they expected them to.

George Webber was something else again. He was as tall as Cliff Cook but weighed at least fifty pounds more, and not an ounce of it was fat. His eyes were gray and glacial. His jaw was square under a tight slit of a mouth. His voice was a quiet baritone with a cutting edge like a sharp skate on ice. He, too, wore the Madison Avenue uniform, but on him it looked a little out of place. Cook was reminded of an oldtime motion picture gangster. The illusion was furthered by a seldom-lit cigar clamped hard between Webber's strong teeth.

George Webber was not a man to meet alone in a dark alley. His position in the Martin Hobbs Enterprises was not entirely clear. An official trouble-shooter, Cook had decided, brought into action only when the "corporate image" created by Don Stanton and played to hilt by Martin Hobbs—cordial, courteous, sympathetic, the best of all good fellows—was not producing the desired results. This, Cook imagined, didn't happen often, but he knew he was about to find out just how tough George Webber could be.

"If you'll make those calls and get out those letters, Miss Garth," Hobbs said to his secretary. "Check with me at lunchtime."

"Of course, Mr. Hobbs." Miss Garth beamed at Cook again and left the room.

Hobbs, all smiles, waved to a chair next to his at the head of the conference table. Don Stanton, notebook at the alert, sat across from Cook. Webber stood over by the windows, cigar bristling, looking down at the side-street traffic.

"Well, Cliff, I have the feeling you've arrived at a decision," Hobbs said.

Cook moved awkwardly in his chair, big fingers tugging at an ear lobe. "Yes, I have come to a decision, Mr. Hobbs," he said. "I'm sorry to have been so long arriving at it."

"My dear fellow, you don't make

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a million-dollar deal in thirty seconds. I wanted you to look into every facet of it carefully."

"I have, and in many respects it would seem foolish to turn it down," Cook said. "But I'm sorry to say that's my decision, Mr. Hobbs. Thanks for your offer—but the answer is no."

There was a sharp exclamation from Don Stanton—a little like that of a puppy that has had its foot stepped on unexpectedly. Hobbs's smile remained, but it was now frozen in place. Webber turned from the window. The corner of his mouth not occupied by the cigar was drawn down in a sardonic grimace. It was an "I told you so" look, plus a curious kind of relief—as if he were about to be taken off the leash.

Hobbs took a cigarette case from his pocket. His hands weren't quite steady as he extracted a cigarette and put it in his mouth. Stanton leaned forward with a lighter.

"I find it hard to accept that as final," Hobbs said.

"I'm afraid it is," Cook said. He felt a little as though he'd struck a defenseless child. "You may find my reasons a little quixotic, Mr. Hobbs. I've always worked for myself. I've had a modest success with some electrical inventions, including the motor you're interested in. But whatever I've turned out has been mine, and I controlled it. If I sell you the patents, even at the generous figure you've suggested, I—I lose all contact with my own product."

"At a guaranteed salary of fifty thousand a year for the rest of your life," Hobbs said sharply, "you'd have no worries again for as long as you live."

"But I'd be doing nothing. Vice-president in charge of—of emptying ashtrays. My blood is in those patents, Mr. Hobbs. It—it would be like selling my child for cash. Now I'm sure, if you were to draw up a contract with me, I could enlarge my facilities and supply you with a certain number of motors per year."

"You want to be in charge of production at our plants?" Webber asked in his harsh, cold voice.

"No, sir. I want to be in charge of production at *my* plant," Cook said.

"Suppose somebody invents something better next week?" Webber said. "You'd be down the drain."

Cook gave him an ingenuous smile. "But down *my* drain, Mr. Webber."

"It's hard to conceive of a man turning down a lifetime of security simply for the pleasure of running small risks in a small business," Hobbs said. The room was air-conditioned, but tiny beads of sweat glistened on the one-time boy wizard's forehead.

"Or running the risk of having no business at all," Webber said flatly. He took the cigar out of his mouth and waved it impatiently at Hobbs. "It's time we took off the kid gloves, isn't it, Martin?"

Cook felt a small pulse of anger beat in his temple. "Threats aren't likely to change my decision, Mr. Webber," he said.

"My dear fellow, nobody's threatening you," Hobbs said.

"It just seems to be time to acquaint you with the facts of business life," Webber said.

There was a knock at the door of the conference room. Stanton, still looking pale around the gills, went quickly to the door and spoke in-

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audibly to someone outside. Then he came back and bent down to say something to Hobbs, who promptly stood up.

"Excuse me for a moment, gentlemen," Hobbs said, and went out into the corridor closing the door behind him.

Webber watched him go, a glint of impatience in his cold eyes.

Out in the hall Pierre Chambrun handed Hobbs a thick manila envelope. "Thousands, five hundreds, and hundreds," he said. "Would you like to count it here, Mr. Hobbs?"

"No," Hobbs said, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. "I'm sure you don't make mistakes, Mr. Chambrun."

"Thank you," Chambrun said. "But as a matter of routine may I ask you to sign this receipt?"

"Of course." Hobbs scribbled his name on the slip of paper Chambrun handed him. "I'm most grateful to you for your prompt and efficient service."

"No trouble at all," Chambrun said. "If there's anything else I can do, be sure to let me know."

Hobbs nodded distractedly, tucked the manila envelope under his arm, and went back into the conference room. He sat down at the head of the table again, placing the envelope on the chair beside him.

"Where were we?" he said.

"We were about to supply our innocent friend with some of the facts of life," Webber said.

Hobbs's shoulders rose in a shrug of assent.

Webber sounded reasonable at first. "The world of big business, of which you seem to have no knowledge, Cook, is a dog-eat-dog affair. The small country grocer has been swallowed up by a supermarket chain. The old-fashioned individual automobile designer has been absorbed by Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, and the like. The wildcat oil speculator sells out to a big oil company. The little man can't handle the enormous problem of mass-quantity distribution. He hasn't the money to make deals on a grand scale.

"No one wants to chop off the little man's head. That small-town grocer is now a supermarket manager, with none of the worries of month-to-month profits. The automobile designer has his drawing board in a Detroit plant. The oil speculator lives high off the hog on his royalties without worrying about pipelines or tankers or oil trucks. The public benefits. Big business can sell its product at a lower price than the small operator. That's the way it is today, Cook. Some of your radicals and so-called liberals may squawk about it—but it's practical, sound business. The loner like you has had his day, Cook. It was a good day, an exciting day, a time of pioneering. But in exchange for that he can now have security. You've been offered a damned big hunk of security, Cook."

"I know," Cook said, tugging at his ear again. "If I refuse, I'll be gambling with the future. I may never make anything like the same amount of money. But as I said, Webber—I'll be my own man."

"There is no such thing today," Webber grated.

"I think there is, and I intend to be it," Cook said. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I've given this a lot of thought, and I—"

"Have you indeed?" Webber said

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ominously. "Let me be frank with you, Cook. We need your patents. We need your motor. It's the best in the market. A contract with you to buy X-number of motors won't do. We're dealing in billion-dollar contracts. We must control every detail involved in the manufacture of our product or the government may decide there's too great an element of risk in awarding their contracts to us. We own the Cook motor and there's no doubt of our being able to fill the contracts; we don't own it, and there may be some doubt. We can't afford to lose those contracts, Cook. We're in far too deep already. So like it or not, you and Hobbs Enterprises have to make a deal."

Hobbs instantly took the menacing edge off Webber's words. "So you see, you have us over a barrel, Cliff. So we tear up the agreement we've discussed. If you want more money, obviously you can demand it. Mind you, we're running risks. We offer you fifty thousand a year for life, win, lose, or draw. As Webber has suggested, someone may invent a better motor tomorrow, or six months from now. We don't ask you to be involved in that risk. You're safe, no matter what new invention may come along. But if you want to name a larger figure —?" The smile was cordial, inviting.

"It's not a matter of money, Mr. Hobbs," Cook said patiently, as if to a child. "It's my own independence, my own freedom of action, that I want."

"There's a hell of a lot of freedom of action in a guaranteed fifty thousand a year," Webber said. "Or seventy-five thousand a year."

Cook moistened his lips. "No, gentlemen. No, I'm sorry. I've thought about it and thought about it and the answer is—no."

Webber's face looked curiously like a stone hatchet. He leaned close to Cook's shoulder to put his dead cigar in an ashtray on the table. There was a faint barber-shop smell to him.

"You're not independently wealthy, Cook," he said. "We know that. You depend for your three squares a day on the income from your business. Your wife's comforts come from the same source. Your child's future education ditto. What would become of you if that income disappeared? I'll tell you. You'd have to look for a job with someone else. There are jobs for electrical engineers in many places, you say. Of course you wouldn't be your own man, but you'd get work, you say. But suppose you found yourself blacklisted?"

Webber was standing behind Cook now and his voice shook slightly, with a kind of cold fury. "Don't you think Hobbs Enterprises could make sure you'd never get a decent job? Don't you think we could put an economic squeeze on you that would ruin your one-man operation in a matter of months, maybe weeks?"

"Are you saying that you will?" Cook asked steadily.

"I'm saying that you're a babe in the woods if you think your personal whims will be allowed to stand in the way of a billion-dollar contract. I'm saying that you're a babe in the woods if you think you can stubbornly hold out beyond our deadline and then expect us to shrug it off as bad luck. I don't know about Martin, but I promise you that long after you've wrecked our deal, I'll keep twisting your arm until it comes off at the socket."

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"Of course it won't come to that," Hobbs said, his charming smile pasted on his face.

Cook stood up. "I think I've had about enough of this," he said. "I don't like being pushed around, gentlemen. If there was any small doubt remaining in my mind Mr. Webber has settled it."

"Damn it, little man, I'm only talking realities!" Webber exploded. "You can't be a grain of sand in the machinery. No one will let you be that in any walk of life. I've at least paid you the compliment of facing you with the truth."

"Okay, George, you've said enough," Hobbs said. "Listen to me, Cliff. George's bitterness is understandable. We have a great deal at stake. I'd like you to do me a favor. We've spent three days going over this deal. Pretend the annual figure to you is blank in the contract. Know that you can fill it in with any amount you think is fair. Go away now, talk it over with your wife, sleep on it, and meet with us once more tomorrow morning. I know that right now you're sure nothing will change your mind. But think about it for twenty-four hours. Is that asking too much?"

Cook hesitated. The red anger he felt at Webber wasn't the best companion to good judgment.

"I hadn't planned to drive home till tomorrow morning," he said. "I'm positive there won't be any change in my point of view, but I'm quite willing to see you in the morning and tell you so again."

Webber had taken a fresh cigar out of his breastpocket and stuck it between his teeth. His cold eyes moved up and down Cook's bony frame as though assessing every ounce of muscle and flesh on it. How much could it take? How much pressure would he have to put in his threatened armlock?

"Fine," Hobbs said, holding out his hand in a frank, friendly manner to Cook. "Talk it over with Mrs. Cook. After all, her future is involved too."

"We've already talked it out," Cook said. "I know it's hard for you to understand, Mr. Hobbs, but my personal working happiness is what's involved here."

George Webber took the cigar out of his mouth and laughed, never taking his eyes off Cook. "I suggest you repeat my part of the conversation to her, Cook. Sometimes women have an instinct for the truth when they hear it. Which is more than can be said for you, my friend."

Cook turned and walked out of the room, shutting the door firmly behind him.

There was a moment of silence and then Hobbs whirled on young Don Stanton. "I thought you told us he was coming in on our side!"

Stanton shook his head like a groggy fighter. "He told me he'd decided, Mr. Hobbs. It never occurred to me he'd decide against us."

Hobbs leaned back wearily in his chair, his right hand closing over the manila envelope. "I want you to get something straight, Don. This is a far more critical situation than I think you realize. The government has been led to believe that we already have the Cook motor for use in rockets. Our proposed contracts with them are based on that assumption. The minute that backwoods long drink of water walks out of here and

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tells some smart government agent or Washington reporter that he hasn't made the deal, Hobbs Enterprises goes up in smoke. Every cent of capital we have has been invested in new plant and new tooling to meet these new contracts. If the rug is pulled out from under us because we don't control the Cook motor we're ten times bankrupt."

"I didn't realize how tight it was, sir."

"Well, now you do. For the next twenty-four hours Hobbs Enterprises have got to burst with optimism. I want you to release the notes to the press—the notes we made on expansion plans. Say that I'm setting up an appointment for the day after tomorrow with the banking group—announce that as if there isn't the slightest possible doubt of the outcome."

"Yes, sir."

"Reserve a table for me tonight in the Blue Lagoon Room. That's where your girl sings, isn't it? Arrange for a party of attractive people and see to it that some of the night-life boys ask me some questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, get on your horse."

Don Stanton hurried out of the room. When he was gone the boy wizard leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. Suddenly he no longer looked like a boy. After a moment he spoke without opening his eyes.

"We don't have any choice, do we, George?"

"None whatever," Webber said. "Not a smidgen of a choice."

Hobbs shook his head from side to side. "It's hard to grasp the fact that a great business empire like this stands to rise or fall on the whim of one stubborn man."

"Maybe you need a few facts-of-life lectures yourself," Webber said. "Yours is a paper empire, Martin, built on paper profits. You've reached a crisis where you have to deal with realities. These new government contracts are for real, but you made one mistake. You said you owned the Cook motor because you were sure you would own it. When you come to sign the contracts and you haven't got the motor you're through. In come the accountants and the Internal Revenue boys and the Senate committees and you've had it—and all the rest of us have had it."

"Cook must have a price," Hobbs said. "Every man has a price."

"It would appear our friend Cook is an exception," Webber said. His thin mouth tightened. "But his price isn't money. But there is a way to buy him, and we have to risk it. It doesn't much matter, Martin, what we go to jail for. Jail is jail. Covering one crime with another is our only choice."

Hobbs sighed. "You think it will work?"

"It'll work," Webber said with grim satisfaction.

Hotel maids don't like to see a "Do Not Disturb" sign hung outside the door of a room. It usually means a disruption of routine. They have to work around that room until the occupant finally comes out.

The maid whose job it was to take care of Room 1208 had been grumbling most of the morning and early afternoon because of the sign outside its door. By three o'clock it was the only room on the floor not done. Mattie Ryan, the maid, called Mrs. Kniffen, the housekeeper, to report.

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Mrs. Kniffen remembered there'd been a query from the phone office early that morning—a call for the occupant, Mr. Fisher, for seven o'clock which he hadn't answered.

"He must be sleepin' off a giant hangover," Mattie said to Mrs. Kniffen. "The TV's been playing ever since I came on this morning."

"You're sure about that, Mattie?"

"You can hear it plain enough outside the door," Mattie said.

Mrs. Kniffen knew the rules. The slightest thing off-beat and you didn't wait unless you wanted Mr. Chambrun down on your back. Mrs. Kniffen called Jerry Dodd, the house security officer. "House dick" or "house detective" were not phrases used at the Hotel Beaumont.

Jerry Dodd, a thin, sharp-eyed man in his middle forties who knew his job as only a man trained by Pierre Chambrun could know it, met Mrs. Kniffen on the twelfth floor five minutes later. They stood outside the door of Room 1208, listening. You could hear the TV set clearly.

Jerry knocked sharply on the door. There was no reply. He took Mrs. Kniffen's passkey and opened the door.

Mr. Fisher was in residence. His room was small but elegant. He sat in the big armchair facing the television set. He was staring at the screen where a mid-afternoon soap opera was winding its lugubrious course. Fisher's eyes were bulging, but they weren't seeing TV. To Jerry's practiced eye he was obviously dead—violently dead.

"Heart attack, I guess," he said casually over his shoulder to Mrs. Kniffen, who couldn't see the dead man from the hall.

In a hotel like the Beaumont, which is larger in population than many small towns, sudden death is not an unusual occurrence. Mrs. Kniffen had encountered it many times over the years. Jerry Dodd was an old hand at it.

"I'll call Dr. Partridge," Mrs. Kniffen said, and scurried off down the hall to her own phone.

Jerry Dodd closed the door of Room 1208, remaining inside the room. Mr. Fisher was young to die so abruptly—in his middle thirties, no older. He hadn't gone to bed the night before. He had apparently died while watching his TV set.

There was a bottle of bourbon, three quarters empty, on the table beside Mr. Fisher's chair. There were two glasses, one with a small portion of a drink still left in it. Mr. Fisher had had company before he left this world.

And Mr. Fisher had not left the world peacefully. Every muscle of his body was extended and rigid. He was bent backward, as though his spinal cord had suddenly contracted. Jerry Dodd was no toxicologist, but he had seen the action of strychnine once before—the lightning-fast action, the muscular convulsions, the final moment of agony.

It was obviously a case of murder in New York's most luxurious hotel —murder de luxe.

(Continued on page 67)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.**

TITLE: ***The Bleeding Ceiling***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *It was a mystery, all right. The ceiling in the Collins' kitchen kept bleeding . . . and then the pets in the apartment house began to disappear . . .*

BERT COLLINS RELAXED IN THE soothing embrace of his shower, and sang lustily. *"Way down upon the Swanee-e-e River . . ."* The day's accumulated tensions dissolved in puddles at his feet. He felt good, and he was, he thought, as he braced himself for the high note, in good voice. *"All the WORLD . . ."* he bellowed, listening for a rattle from the metal wastebasket and an onslaught on the wall from old Mr. Flattery, who lived in the next apartment.

The basket rattled. Mr. Flattery pounded. Pleased, Collins allowed his voice to trail away as he turned off the shower.

He stepped from the tub and reached for a towel, and at that instant his wife's piercing scream stabbed at him from the other end of the apartment. Collins made a moist dash through the living room, and came to a sliding halt in the kitchen. Irene stood in the center of the room, white-faced, staring up at the ceiling.

"It looks like blood!" she gasped.

Two jagged cracks meandered across the ceiling, and from one of them a red substance oozed, letting fall an occasional drop that patted softly onto the floor.

"It dripped on *me!*" Irene said, her whisper touched with horror.

Collins found his own voice. "M'God—Mrs. Simmons!"

Clutching the towel tightly about him, he ran out and headed upstairs.

Every apartment building needs

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at least one attractive widow to lend a touch of exotic mystery, of implied—even if unspoken—scandal to its otherwise mundane atmosphere. The Crestwood Arms had Mrs. Simmons. Though the thought had never occurred to Collins, he realized, as he raced up the stairway, that it would not surprise him in the least to find her on her kitchen floor with her throat cut.

"If the door's unlocked . . ." he breathed, throwing himself at it.

It was unlocked. It was also slightly ajar, and his momentum catapulted him into the living room, where he overturned a chair and almost lost his grip on the towel.

From the far corner of the room came a squeal of outraged modesty. "Really, Mr. Collins!"

Mrs. Simmons arose wide-eyed from her television program, and backed slowly away from him. "Really, Mr. Collins!" she said again, while he panted and fought to catch his breath, mentally cringing before her crisp impeccability. "If this is your idea of a *joke* . . ."

Collins waved his free hand, groping wildly for something to say. "You musta spilled something in the kitchen," he gasped finally. "It's running through our ceiling."

"Nonsense! I haven't spilled anything."

"Something red," Collins said. "It's running . . ."

"Come and see for yourself."

He followed her into the kitchen. The room had a polished, sparkling orderliness that attested to its scant use. Mrs. Simmons took most of her meals out. Collins measured off the distance with his eyes, and stared at the floor. The freshly waxed linoleum gleamed immaculately. Obviously nothing had been spilled there.

Collins said lamely, "Well, *something* is leaking through our ceiling."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Simmons said. "Even if I did spill something, it wouldn't go through your ceiling. Linoleum doesn't leak."

"*Something* leaks," Collins said. "I thought—I mean, I wondered . . ."

He looked again at the floor, muttered, "Sorry," and retreated. Behind him, Mrs. Simmons closed her door firmly and locked it with a deliberate clatter.

Irene had placed a pan on the floor, and the drops landed there with a solid plunk. The two of them stood looking up at the ceiling.

"What happened?" Irene asked.

"Nothing," Collins said. "At least, she *says* nothing happened."

"I won't have blood dripping in my kitchen. Get Mr. Holtzman."

"First," Collins said savagely, "I'm getting dressed. *Then* I'll get Mr. Holtzman."

The building superintendent, a wiry little man whose head was obviously fashioned for a different—and larger—body, listened to

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Collins grumpily. "Leak? You mean, a leaky faucet?"

"No," Collins said.

"Leaky pipe?"

"I dunno. Come and see it yourself."

Holtzman picked up a toolbox and followed Collins upstairs.

For a long time he stood gaping at the oozing ceiling. "There ain't no pipes up there," he announced finally.

"It has to come from somewhere," Collins said.

Irene thrust the pan under Holtzman's nose. "It looks like blood."

Holtzman tugged at his overalls, and shrugged. "Rusty pipes, maybe," he said. "Only there ain't no pipes up there. Maybe Mrs. Simmons . . ."

"She said she didn't spill anything," Collins said.

"I'll check."

He returned with a ladder, mounted it, and squinted cautiously at the cracked ceiling. "Whatever it is, it's stopped," he announced. He sponged away the ooze, leaving a ragged patch on the soiled ceiling; then he descended and gave the floor a few desultory swipes.

"Aren't you going to fix it?" Irene asked.

"There's nothing to fix," Holtzman said. "There's nothing up there to leak, and anyway, it's stopped."

He shouldered the ladder and marched off. Collins sat down in the corner of the kitchen and stared at the ceiling, and Irene rinsed out the pan and poured some disinfectant into it. Neither of them mentioned the incident again, though at supper Collins noticed, when he put ketchup on his French fried potatoes, that Irene shuddered.

After supper Collins settled down with his seventy-watt stereo amplifier and twin fifteen-inch speakers to play a few rock-and-roll records. At fifteen watts per channel Mrs. Simmons sometimes pounded on the floor. At eighteen she invariably did. This time she did not, so she had not returned from eating at the Rendezvous Café across the street.

Collins relaxed, feet pounding in time with the music, and refrained from moving the volume beyond twenty watts, where Old Mrs. Teaworth, in the apartment below, would have pounded on the ceiling with her cane, and Ed McGaffity would have come storming from across the hallway to protest.

At seven thirty Irene marched in from the kitchen, turned off the amplifier, and announced flatly, "It's started again."

Collins went to look. Red drops were plunking steadily into the pan that Irene had placed on the floor.

"Get Mr. Holtzman," she said.

"I guess so," Collins said.

The doorbell rang. Old Mrs. Teaworth stood there, leaning against the door frame. "Have you seen Bootsie?"

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"No," Collins said. "I haven't been out all evening."

"I can't find her anywhere."

Mrs. Teaworth hobbled away, and Collins closed the door.

"What'd she want?" Irene asked.

"She can't find her cat."

"Oh," Irene said. Then her face went white. "Bootsie? The blood? Do you think . . ."

"Nuts!" Collins said. He went back to the kitchen. The dripping had slowed to a few intermittent plunks. The pan had accumulated just enough to cover its bottom. Collins picked it up and studied the contents carefully.

Irene came and stood beside him. "It looks like blood."

"Nuts," Collins said, looking at the ceiling. "Bootsie couldn't get in there."

"What is it, then?"

"I'll go find Holtzman," Collins said.

The superintendent was not in his basement apartment. Collins went to the front entrance and stood there looking out at the street. Old Mrs. Teaworth plodded along the sidewalk calling pathetically, "Bootsie! Bootsie!" Holtzman came down the street from the other direction, and Collins went out to meet him.

"Mrs. Teaworth lost her cat," Holtzman said. "I've been looking for it."

"Maybe we've found it," Collins said. "The blood is dripping again."

Holtzman stared. "Naw—no cat could possibly get up in there."

"Chasing a mouse, maybe," Collins said.

"There ain't any mouse in this building," Holtzman protested.

"Well, the blood is dripping again, just the same. And Mrs. Teaworth lost her cat. Call it anything you want to, but get that dripping *stopped*."

"I better take another look," Holtzman said.

The dripping had stopped, but the superintendent brought the ladder and swabbed off the ceiling again, and then he sat watching it for a few minutes.

"I guess it's stopped," he said finally. "Anyway, there ain't any pipes up there."

And he left.

Collins moved about the apartment restlessly. He turned on his hi-fi, turned it off, turned on the TV, turned it off, and then in a sudden burst of generosity he went out to join the futile search for Mrs. Teaworth's cat. Irene had already gone to bed when he returned. He went to the kitchen for a last uneasy look at the ceiling.

In the morning there was no evidence of further leaking. Collins, feeling mildly reassured, went off to his day of bus driving. He returned home that evening to an empty apartment, and a kitchen with a freshly stained ceiling and a newly spattered floor.

Irene was downstairs in Mrs. Teaworth's apartment. "I'm not

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going back to that place," she announced. "I want to move."

"We can't move," Collins said. "We have a lease."

"The lease doesn't say we have to live in a place where blood keeps dripping down on us. I *won't* go back there."

Collins found Holtzman again. "Either you fix that," he said, "or we're leaving."

Holtzman went to a battered desk in the corner and consulted a ledger. "Your lease has got a year and five months to go. You can move out anytime you want, but you gotta keep paying the rent."

"I'll see a lawyer," Collins said.

In front of the apartment building he met Mr. Flattery. "Have you seen my dog?" the old man asked.

Collins winced, shook his head, and hurried off toward Broad Street. He found Officer Edwards standing absently on the corner in front of White's Pharmacy.

"Howdy, Bert," Edwards said.

"I got something for you," Collins said. "There's blood leaking through my kitchen ceiling."

Edwards almost dropped his nightstick. *"Blood?* You sure?"

Collins nodded.

"Let's go," Edwards said.

A short distance from the Crestwood Arms they met Mr. Flattery, who tried to tell Edwards about the missing dog. The policeman brushed him aside.

When they reached the Collins kitchen, the ceiling was dripping again. Edwards took one long look, and headed upstairs. Collins paused to set a pan on the floor, then quickly followed the officer.

The door was open at the Simmons apartment, and Collins found Edwards in the kitchen talking with Mrs. Simmons. "This is right over your kitchen, isn't it?" he asked Collins.

Collins nodded.

"It isn't coming from here," Edwards said.

"Of course not," Mrs. Simmons said. "Why, the idea! I think Mr. Collins is imagining things."

"Come down and see for yourself," Collins said.

"I haven't that much morbid curiosity," Mrs. Simmons said huffily.

Collins and Edwards returned downstairs. Edwards picked up the pan, which had a small accumulation of liquid, and sniffed at it. "Doesn't smell like anything," he announced.

"What does blood smell like?" Collins asked.

Edwards shrugged. "Where's Holtzman?"

"I'll get him," Collins said.

Holtzman came with his ladder, and Edwards climbed up for a closer look at the ceiling. "How much space is there between the ceiling and the floor above?" he asked.

"Not much," Holtzman said. "Not more than four inches or so, I'd say."

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"There's Mrs. Teaworth's cat that disappeared, and now there's Flattery's dog," Collins said.

"McGaffity's dog is gone, too," Holtzman said. "But you ain't going to make me think them animals is up there bleeding. There ain't no way for them to get up there."

Edwards came down from the ladder. "What you need," he said, "is a plumber."

"There ain't any pipes up there," Holtzman said.

"Call a plumber anyway," Edwards said. "Sorry, Bert, that's the best I can do for you—I think it's just plumbing trouble."

He left, and Collins glared at Holtzman. "Well, you heard him. Are you going to call a plumber?"

"I already did," Holtzman said. "I had Steve Ainsley over this morning, when your missus was kicking up such a fuss. Steve says the pipes ain't causing it, because they ain't anywhere near where it's leaking, and if the pipes leaked it'd come down somewhere else. As far as we can see, there ain't *nothing* that's causing it."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," Holtzman said. "If nothing's causing it, there's nothing to do."

"I'll tear that ceiling down myself."

"Then you'll pay for getting it fixed," Holtzman said. "It says so in your lease."

"Then we're leaving."

"Suit yourself. But you'll be paying rent for another year and five months, and don't say I didn't warn you."

Holtzman took away the ladder, and Collins sat down and gazed despondently at the ceiling. The leak started again, the red drops falling into the pan now in a steady patter.

Irene was still in Mrs. Teaworth's apartment. She said, "Is it still—"

Collins nodded.

"Then I'm not going back," she said. "Do you know *three* cats and *two* dogs are missing?"

"Including my Bootsie," Mrs. Teaworth said mournfully.

"I'm *not* going back," Irene said.

"I don't blame you," Mrs. Teaworth said.

"Go look for another apartment, then," Collins said.

"I already have," Irene said. "There's one empty where Sue Marsh lives. I looked at it this afternoon. They'll hold it for us until tomorrow morning."

"Call them up and tell them we'll take it," Collins said. "I'm going to see a lawyer."

Holtzman met him in the hallway. "I talked to the boss," he said. "It's only five days to the end of the month. He says if you're out by then, and you're willing to surrender your deposit, he'll cancel the lease."

"Get that in writing," Collins said, "and we'll start moving now."

George Smith, who lived on the

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fourth floor of the Crestwood Arms, met Holtzman coming in the door of the building. Holtzman was leading two dogs and carrying three cats, none of which was enjoying the process, and he needed help badly. Smith relieved him of two of the cats.

"Where were they?" he asked.

"My brother was keeping them for me," Holtzman said.

"Collins is gone, then?"

Holtzman nodded. "Never thought they'd manage it so fast. We figured on keeping this up for a week, at least, but I got the release this evening, and he signed it, and inside of an hour they had everything moved out."

"Good riddance," Smith said.

"Amen," Holtzman said. "Why I gave them a two-year lease I'll never know."

"Just how did you manage that ceiling business?"

"Jim Benson, over at White's Pharmacy, mixed me a jug of the stuff. I pried up a board in one of Mrs. Simmons' closets, then ran a tube under the floor to the middle of the kitchen, and put a funnel on it in the closet. Whenever we wanted the ceiling to leak, Mrs. Simmons poured some into the funnel."

"Slick," Smith said.

"Oh, it took some work," Holtzman said. "But it was worth it. Everyone in the building cooperated, too. That hi-fi just had to go."

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THE MACHINE IN PROFESSOR HATHAWAY'S HEAD

by ALICE SOKOLOFF

NONE OF IT SEEMED REAL WHEN it happened and yet none of it was strange or surprising either.

He pushed the papers away with a sigh, stacked them carefully, and then laid them aside on the cluttered desk. He glanced at his watch. Five minutes to twelve. His rare hour free from teaching was nearly up and he would have to leave in a moment for his noon Shakespeare class—*Hamlet*, today.

Outside the window of his small office in Harris Hall, the palm tree was still; not a breath of air was moving its shiny green. He looked longingly at a pile of books on the far corner of his desk. There was that new life of Robert Frost. Would he ever have time to read it?

When the phone rang, he felt a

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momentary twinge of resentment at the interruption and wondered briefly whether to let it go on ringing.

"Professor Hathaway?" The voice on the phone was gruff, urgent.

"Yes."

"This is Lieutenant Dakin, Professor. I think you'd better come home. There's been an accident. Your wife."

It was at this moment that reality seemed to fade and the dream took over. It was almost as though a switch had suddenly been turned on.

"My wife?" he said. "You mean, something has happened to my wife?"

"Yes, Professor. I'm afraid I've got some very bad news for you. We found your wife a few minutes ago. In the swimming pool. You'd better come right away."

"Is she—is she dead?"

"Yes . . . I'm sorry. There was nothing we could do. She must have hit her head somehow. Her neck's broken."

Hathaway put down the phone slowly, deliberately. His eye fell for a moment on the palm tree outside, dipping now in a gentle breeze. He reached for the phone again, his mind and movements continuing like a well-oiled machine.

"Dean Briggs? Hathaway here. I'm afraid I can't take my noon class. Shakespeare, you know.—Yes, something has come up. Elfrida seems to have had an accident.—Well, yes, it is serious. I'll tell you about it later. By the way, Johnny Randall could take over my class—you know, that Senior. He's a good boy. He'll make a good teacher."

With a sigh he got up from his swivel chair. That old chair had been with him for a good many years now. He tried to remember when he had got it. Twenty—no, nearer twenty-five years ago—soon after he and Elfrida had married, when they were still up in Ohio. He remembered how she had objected to his bringing it down here to Florida.

"That horrible chair! You've had it at least fifteen years. Throw it out. I just won't let you take it."

But for once he had persisted. He loved that chair, with its lumpy leather upholstery that years of use had molded to his body. It was almost a part of himself.

It was a short walk to the parking lot. The hot sun burned through the faded seersucker of his jacket. Classes were changing now and the walks were filled with students, talking and laughing in the loud, confident voices of youth.

The door of the car stuck, as it usually did, and he had to give it that special jerk. He fumbled in his pockets for the keys, shifting his heavy brief case from one arm to the other several times before he located them. For once the motor

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started up on the first try. He was pleasantly surprised for he usually had to push the starter button several times if the car had been standing for any length of time.

It was only a three-minute drive to his house. The driveway was blocked and he had to go quite far down the street before he found a parking place for the car. As he walked back to the house he watched the flashing red light on the rescue truck blinking at him.

A man in uniform stopped him at the door.

"I'm Professor Hathaway. I live here." He ran his hand through his graying hair with a worried, familiar gesture.

"Oh, yes. The Lieutenant is expecting you. Go right in, please."

The small living room seemed even more cluttered than usual with all the people in it. It was almost like one of those cocktail parties that Elfrida gave all the time with everyone shouting to be heard, and noise and people everywhere.

A short, rather dumpy woman pushed her way toward him. "Professor, I feel just awful about this." Her strident voice was shrill. "I was the one who found her."

Hathaway pushed her aside wordlessly and made his way across the room out onto the small screened porch in back. Idly he noticed the torn screen and reminded himself for the hundredth time that he must fix it.

"Professor Hathaway? I'm Lieutenant Dakin."

He turned and saw the bright blue eyes, the strong sunburned face of the police officer who had come up behind him. He took off his glasses and wiped them carefully, leaning against the door jam as though the vitality and vigor of the young lieutenant had sapped his own energy.

"I'm very sorry about this, Professor. Very sorry."

Hathaway nodded silently, putting on his glasses.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. There is one thing, though, first. May I see her? I'd like to see her."

The Lieutenant looked at him dubiously. "Okay, if you're sure you want to. The ambulance will be along any minute to take her away. They've got to make a complete examination, you know. All cases of accidental death. They've got to be certified."

Hathaway waited silently. The Lieutenant hesitated a moment before he pushed open the door and led the way across the dry strip of lawn, through an opening in a hedge of hibiscus. Here the grass was green and lush around the swimming pool, with the hibiscus forming a brilliant border on all four sides. Something lay there, on the side of the pool, under a blanket.

"Are you sure, Professor?"

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"I'm sure."

He looked down at Elfrida, or rather, at Elfrida's body. And yet, her body had been Elfrida. It had been her obsession. What care she had lavished on every muscle, every tendon, every inch of that smooth, darkly sunburned skin! How she had dreaded the slightest sign of the encroachment of age on that perfect body!

He stared at her unblinkingly. In spite of her forty-five years, she still looked almost like a young girl. How she had raged at him about his gray hair, his slack posture, his forgetfulness.

"You make me seem old too. Just because I'm married to you people will think I'm as old as you are."

"Say you're my child bride," he would answer drily.

Her face looked wonderfully peaceful now. The lines of irritation and tension about her mouth and eyes seemed to have been wiped away.

"Your neighbor, Mrs. Nelson, called us about it. She came over here with her sister about half-past eleven and saw her there, at the bottom of the pool. First we thought she was drowned. That's why we got the rescue truck. But it was her neck. Broke it somehow. There's a big bruise on the back of her neck."

Hathaway turned with a little sigh. "Thank you, Lieutenant."

"I'd like to ask you those questions now—if you think you're up to it. Is there somewhere we can go and talk quietly? There's a terrible mob in the house."

"I'm afraid there's only the bedroom there and you can hear nearly everything from one room to the other. Perhaps it would be better if we sat out here." He gestured vaguely toward some chairs at the foot of the pool.

"You're sure you won't mind? Being out here, I mean. They'll be coming to get her, you know."

"I won't mind."

They sat down on white chairs in the brilliant sun. Hathaway balanced his brief case against the leg of the table, then leaned back slowly, crossing one long leg over the other. His eyes, magnified by thick glasses, looked out across the pool.

"My wife loved white. She wanted everything around the pool to be white. Even the diving board. See that white canvas on the diving board? She used to change it regularly, every time it got the least bit soiled or yellow."

"She liked to swim?"

Hathaway smiled wryly. "That's an understatement. Swimming, diving, that was her main interest in life . . ."

"Did she do any competing?"

"The salary of a college professor doesn't give much leeway for traveling, but she'd go around to clubs if they weren't far away."

"This pool is quite a set-up for a college professor, isn't it?"

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Hathaway shrugged. "It's what Elfrida wanted." He took out a pack of cigarettes, shook one out, and started fumbling in his pockets for matches.

"Would you say your wife was an expert swimmer and diver?" The Lieutenant leaned over and flicked a lighter under Hathaway's cigarette.

"Yes, I would. She has quite a collection of cups to prove it."

"Doesn't it seem a little strange then that she would have an accident like this?"

"Perhaps. But a good diver comes very close to the board. Very close indeed." He shook his head gently. "I used to think about it a great deal, that some day she might slip or misjudge somehow and hit her head on the board."

"Did you talk to her about it? Did you warn her?"

Hathaway looked up with a deprecating glance. "No. No, I didn't. Elfrida didn't think I knew very much about such things."

"Where were you this morning, Professor?"

Hathaway stretched his long legs, half closed his eyes. The machine inside his head was running smoothly, effortlessly. It was almost as though he were listening to a tape recorder, a tape that he had heard many times before. It all seemed very familiar. His answer was automatic.

"At the College."

"Did you teach all morning?"

"Well, let me see. What is today? Wednesday? No, it can't be."

"It's Tuesday."

"Oh, yes, Tuesday." He took a small notebook from his pocket and looked through the pages. "Here we are. Tuesday I start at nine with a survey course in English Lit. Then at ten I have Intermediate Composition, and at eleven Freshman English, and twelve is my Shakespeare class." His eyes shone. "I have a very good group in Shakespeare this year. Really quite exceptional. One student, Johnny Randall, is really the best student I have ever had. He's a senior transfer and his background is very fine. But the exciting thing is that he is a scholar, a real scholar with all that implies." Hathaway suddenly caught the Lieutenant's eye and looked momentarily bewildered. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, this probably doesn't interest you very much. I forgot for a moment what we were here for."

"So you had classes from nine o'clock on, did you?" A group of men came through the hedge, carrying a stretcher. Lieutenant Dakin went over and spoke quietly to one of the men in uniform. Together they went to the diving board and removed the white canvas cover, folding it carefully. The uniformed officer went off with it under his arm and behind him went the men with the now heavy stretcher between them.

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Hathaway watched it go.

"You're a cool one, Professor. Not many people can take a thing like this like you do."

"When you've lived as long as I have you learn to keep your feelings to yourself."

"Maybe." The Lieutenant eyed him quizzically. "So, if you were teaching all morning, how come I was able to get you on the phone in your office?"

There was a sudden commotion over toward the house. A police officer came through the hedge, followed by two young men dressed in bright sports shirts. The officer spoke to Dakin.

"These two guys say they were here this morning. I thought maybe you'd like to talk with them."

"Good idea. Bring over a couple of those chairs, will you? Then stick around in the house. I'm waiting for a phone call from the lab. Sit down, boys."

The taller of the two, his face pale under his sunburn, cleared his throat nervously. "I'm Joe Nelson, and this is Pete Williams."

"Nelson? Any relation to the Mrs. Nelson who lives next door?"

"She's my mother."

"Okay. Now what's on your mind?"

"Well, my mother just told us about what happened—to Mrs. Hathaway, I mean. She thought—well, you see, we sort of thought maybe we'd better tell you about being over here this morning."

"Go ahead and tell me, then."

Joe looked at his friend, and cleared his throat again. "Well, you see, it was this way. We cut a class this morning."

"You're at the College?"

"Yes. You see, the swimming meet is next week and we figured, you know, the more practice we got the better."

"So why did you come here?"

"Well, you see, the College pool isn't open in the mornings, and Mrs. Hathaway—well, she sort of took an interest in us and said we could come here any time we wanted to practice."

"So?"

"So we cut our ten o'clock History class and came over here."

"Did you see Mrs. Hathaway?"

"Oh, yes, she was here. She always helped us a lot. She was a wonderful athlete."

"How long did you stay?"

"Well, we got here just a few minutes after ten. We must have stayed nearly an hour. We just got in under the wire for our next class."

"So you left about five of eleven, say?"

"I guess so."

"And how was Mrs. Hathaway when you left?"

"She was fine. Just fine." Joe looked miserable. "She was lying over there on the edge of the pool taking a sun bath. Said we'd worn her out and she was going to rest."

"That how it happened Pete?"

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The smaller boy nodded vigorously. "Yes, sir, just like Joe said."

"Tell me, Joe. What did your mother tell you about what happened?"

"Well, she said Mrs. Hathaway was dead. That she'd broken her neck diving."

"How did that strike you? Do you think a good diver like Mrs. Hathaway could have an accident like that?"

"Hell, no! I mean, I'm sorry, sir, but Pete and I just didn't see how such a thing *could* happen. Not to her. Not to Mrs. Hathaway. She was just too good an athlete. She just couldn't have an accident like that."

Dakin looked over at Hathaway who was sitting, legs outstretched, hands folded across his chest, seemingly paying no attention to what was being said.

"That's why Mom said we should come over and tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"Well, like I said—how Mrs. Hathaway was just fine when we left and how she said she was tired and was going to rest. She used to take long sun baths like that. Why, sometimes she'd lie there a couple of hours after she'd been swimming hard. I don't think she started swimming again so soon and even if she did she never could have an accident like that."

"So what do you think happened, Joe?"

"Well, I don't know." The boy's face was tense. "Mom says that she and the Professor here—well, she says—Mom, I mean—they never got along too good—the Professor and Mrs. Hathaway, I mean. He just liked his books and hated people and she liked people and they argued all the time and—well, I don't know. I just don't think it was an accident—sir."

"All right, Joe. You did the right thing to come over. You go along home now. I'll get in touch with you if I need you."

The boys shuffled off, carefully avoiding even a glance at Hathaway.

The two men sat in silence for a few moments looking out over the blue water and the soft green grass. The machine inside Hathaway's head was purring, waiting.

"Okay, Professor, where were we? Oh, yes, about my phone call. How come you were in your office at 11:55?"

"I had a free hour this morning. My Freshman English class was having library orientation."

Dakin looked at his notebook. "Freshman English? That means that you were free between eleven and twelve. Where were you?"

"I was in my office."

"Anyone see you there?"

Hathaway shook his head. "I don't know. I really don't remember." He rubbed his forehead. "There are not many people around during classes. Only between classes."

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"You would have had plenty of time to come here to the house and still be back in your office when I called?"

"Yes, I suppose I would."

"Don't you ever come home when you have some time off like that?"

Hathaway shook his head. "No, I don't. You heard Joe, didn't you? He said I hate people. I can't agree with that. But I do like quiet. And my wife didn't. There were always people around. People swimming, people for drinks, people playing bridge in the evenings." He was silent for a moment. "There just didn't seem to be any place I could go to get away from them. You can hear everything in that thin-walled house. I keep my books in my office at the College. I like to read. I have to do a lot of reading to keep up in my profession. And I love it. I don't think Elfrida read five books in all the years since she left school. She didn't understand about my books. She didn't understand that I spent so much of the day with students and their problems that I just liked to be quiet when I came home. And such noisy people she used to have. No, I didn't come home." He looked at Dakin. "Why are you asking me all these questions?"

"Well, it's simple, isn't it? That blow could have come from hitting the board, sure, but it also could have come just as easily from someone hitting her with something heavy. If she was dozing there by the pool, like the boys said, it wouldn't have been hard to do. It wouldn't have been hard at all. From what you say, things weren't that smooth between you and her. Maybe you wanted her out of the way."

"Nonsense."

"Don't say nonsense, Professor. You see a lot of things in my business that seem maybe like nonsense but are for real!" The detective gave Hathaway a searching look. "So there's really no way to prove you were in your office at the College and not back here between, say, five past eleven and ten of twelve?"

Hathaway absent-mindedly ran his fingers through his hair. Deep inside his head he could hear the tape recorder running along, almost like a prompter. "Let me see. Well, there are the themes."

"Themes? What do you mean?"

"The themes from my Intermediate Composition class."

"What about them? What do they have to do with anything?"

"I corrected them."

"I don't quite get what you mean, Professor."

"Sorry. I'll try to be more explicit. The students turned in their bi-weekly themes today and I corrected them."

"Yes."

"How many were there?"

"Oh, it's a big class. A really big class for Composition. Forty-two

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students. That's a lot of themes."

"I'd like to see those papers, Professor."

Hathaway reached for the brief case at his feet and began rummaging through it, shuffling papers, taking one out occasionally and looking at it more closely.

"I'm sorry. They're not here. I must have left them in my office. If you'd like to come over there with me, I'll be glad to show them to you."

The house was quieter now. A police car pulled up as they reached the sidewalk and the Lieutenant spoke briefly to the man at the wheel.

"We can ride over in this car, Professor. Get in."

"If you don't mind, I'd rather take my own car. I might stay over at the College if you won't need me any longer."

"Okay. I'll ride over with you. Sam, pick me up at the College in about a half hour, will you?"

The car door stuck again and Hathaway gave his special jerk to open it. He pressed the starter button, but this time it took several tries before the motor caught.

"Old Betsy gets kind of lazy after she has been standing a while. I almost hate to make her work." He smiled and patted the steering wheel. "I've had her a long time. We're old friends."

A strong wind was blowing now on the campus and the palm trees were rattling.

"Here we are, Lieutenant. Here's my cubbyhole. Pull up a chair, won't you?"

He went over to the large desk, littered with papers, pencils, books, and an overflowing ashtray. He smiled comfortably.

"Here they are. Right on top. I should have remembered." He handed the Lieutenant an armful of papers. Dakin cleared a corner of the desk and set them down. He started thumbing through them, carefully looking at the names, dates, and Intermediate Composition written in the upper right-hand corner of each.

"That's quite a batch of papers." He looked up.

"Yes, it is. We've got a very good enrollment in that class this year. Forty-two students. Approximately a thousand words each. That makes about forty-two thousand words, give or take a few, doesn't it?"

"Is this your handwriting?" Dakin pointed to one of the many penciled comments on one of the papers.

"Yes, that's mine."

Dakin riffled through the papers again. On nearly every page there was a word or short phrase written in pencil in the margin.

"You mean you did all this in one hour?"

"Yes. You get the habit, you know, after you've been at it as long as I have."

Dakin shook his head wonder-

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ingly. "I still don't see how you do it. I've heard a lot about fast readers lately, but I've never seen one. Did you take one of those courses?"

Hathaway shook his head. "No. I've always read rather rapidly."

"Rather rapidly. I'll say! Just how many words a minute do you figure you read?"

"I can't say I've ever timed myself. Let's see. Suppose I got here about ten past eleven. I'd just finished when you called at five to twelve. Forty-two thousand words in forty-five minutes." He squinted his eyes for a moment. "That would come to more than nine hundred words a minute. Of course, you have to count out the time it took to make the corrections. That is the slowest part of it all."

"I still don't see how you can do it. Even if you could read twice as fast as that, with all those corrections I just don't see how it can be done."

Hathaway shrugged.

"There's one other thing, Professor. You won't mind if I check with some of the students to make sure just when these papers were turned in, would you? It's just routine, but I'll have to do it."

"Not at all. That's perfectly all right."

"And would you let me have a sample of your handwriting too? Just to check it against these corrections."

Hathaway searched through several drawers before he found a fresh sheet of paper. He scribbled a few lines hastily and handed the sheet to the Lieutenant. "Here. Will this do?"

"Just fine. Thanks."

"You'll find it's all exactly as I told you. That is my handwriting and those themes were turned in to me this morning just before eleven o'clock."

Dakin nodded. "I'm sure it's all okay—just routine, you know. Tying up all the knots. I guess I can pretty well say for sure now that it will be certified as an accident. The lab test on that canvas from the diving board did show traces of blood and tissue that matched your wife's. Funny, it was sort of yellow and had some mildew spots on it—as though it had been put away for a long time. You remember you told me she couldn't stand to have it anything but perfectly white and clean? That made me wonder for a while if someone could have taken one of those covers and used it to wrap around a club of some sort. Then after hitting her put it on the diving board to make it look like an accident." The Lieutenant laughed. "I guess I was just imagining things. You know how it is—a detective's always got to be suspicious."

"I suppose so."

"Well, Professor, I guess I'll be moving along. You've been a great help. Thanks a lot." He shook his

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head wonderingly. "Imagine anybody being able to read and correct all this stuff in forty-five minutes! That's what I call a real alibi. I still can't believe it."

After the Lieutenant had gone, Hathaway sat down in his comfortable old chair. He wasn't hungry. He'd just skip lunch today, he thought. He smiled to himself as he thought of the detective's reaction to his reading speed. He had noticed the Lieutenant's lips moving as he read a phrase or two here and there.

Dakin was a man who should take one of those speed-reading courses. That was one of the first things they taught—not to mouth the words as you read them. Then, of course, increasing the span of words that the eyes took in at a glance. Yes, even a man like Dakin could undoubtedly increase his reading speed ten times if he worked at it.

Suddenly the Professor felt tired and his body relaxed against the familiar contours of his chair. The machine in his head was quiet now. There was nothing in his mind at all. Just quiet—peace and quiet.

Mechanically he reached for a book. The new life of Robert Frost. It looked interesting. He opened the cover and examined it for a moment. Then he turned to the first page and began reading. His left hand moved quickly down the margin, flipping the pages rapidly. He had just about one hour till his afternoon class. He could finish the book easily. It was only 434 pages long. At his unusually moderate reading pace of three thousand words a minute, which he reserved only for books of special interest, there would be plenty of time.

Hathaway settled himself more comfortably and read on.

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Before we could publish Alice Sokoloff's "first story," we received her second; and for the second time in 22 years we have decided to publish a writer's first and second stories back to back in the same issue . . . Here, then, is another look into the mind of a murderer —the mind of a man who learned that he had married a woman with only one rule of life: what she wanted she got, and what she got she devoured . . .

LIKE FLIPPING A COIN

by ALICE SOKOLOFF

Thursday, July 12th

"How shall I kill her?" That is the question in my mind now, the only question. I don't ask myself any longer: "Shall I kill her?" I don't try to discover whether there is any other way out of the intolerable position in which I find myself. I know there is not.

I have always been able to formulate ideas on the typewriter; everything seems to fall into place that way and I can see things clearly, sharply. That is why I decided that the best way to find the answer to my question, "*How* shall I kill her?" is to put down all the facts as they come to me and gradually, I know, the way will become clear.

We have been up here at her camp in the Adirondacks for the last two weeks. "Our" camp, she calls it, but it is hers completely—as everything she comes near becomes hers, inexorably, inevitably.

I am writing this in what she calls my "den." (How I hate that word!) It is a little one-room cabin several hundred yards behind the main house, deep in the pine woods. It is not a fancy room. An iron bed, a wicker settee, two straight chairs, one lamp, the Adirondack stove in the corner, and this table by the window on which my typewriter is set. I come here officially to "write"—that is, to turn out more of the emasculated stories I have been trying to sell for the past eight years, since our marriage.

It is a somewhat Spartan room, but I like it that way. I have had too much of the softness and comfort that Helene surrounds herself with wherever she goes.

What does the word "camp" suggest to you? I'll tell you what it suggests to me. Rough beams, heavy stone fireplaces, bare floors with perhaps an Indian rug or a

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bearskin on them—something simple. And what has Helene made of her camp? Paneled walls, thick pile rugs everywhere, enormous sofas strewn with cushions, picture windows, tiled bathrooms—in short, almost a replica, except for the view over the lake, of her luxurious New York apartment. This is where we come to "rough it" for two months every summer.

There are a few other camps around the lake, all discreetly hidden from each other so that it is possible to avoid any hint of solitude or isolation and yet maintain the fiction of being "close to nature." There is a community clubhouse too where every Saturday night the summer residents dance and have a buffet dinner. Helene gives a cocktail party before each weekly shindig, with dainty hors d'oeuvres and stiff drinks for everyone. Oh, yes, life up here at the Great Bear Club is never dull.

But I've been digressing, and that is something I have been doing less and less lately. I no longer slip into my Walter Mitty dream world which, during these past eight years, has become increasingly real to me. For now I have a purpose in life, a purpose for living.

"How shall I kill her?" The thought obsesses me. During the past two weeks I would come to my little cabin in the woods, and instead of trying to maintain a pretense of working I have stretched out on the bed and tried to evolve a murder plan. At first it was all quite amorphous and I would spend hours and hours going over my resentments and bitterness, living over the things she has done that have curdled my soul. For instance, the way she slyly lets everyone know that I have sold only three stories in the eight years of our marriage and none at all during the past five—that we are living entirely off her money. No wonder I have developed a panic about writing; no wonder I feel like a woman of twenty-nine who is still without a husband and sees her chances growing dimmer with every passing month. I approach a story with the same over-eager desire to please that makes men flee from the spinster. Ideas flee from me in the same way. No man can write that way.

Eight years of marriage to Helene and everything I was sure of, everything I depended on within myself, has disintegrated.

Let me go back to the time before I got married and try to remember myself as I used to be—before Helene went to work on me. That last year? Well, I was young then (but I'm only forty now—is that too late to find oneself again? It can't be!) Anyway, I was eight years younger chronologically, but at least a hundred years younger in spirit. I was teaching English Literature at a small college in Florida. My first book had been accepted for publication and was just

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about to appear. The publisher asked me to come to New York over the Christmas holidays. I wonder if anyone remembers that novel any more, except for Helene's friends to whom she manages to suggest that a great many writers have only a single book in them. *Streak in the Dust,* it was called. The critics said it was "forceful," "vital," a book with a "driving message." Oh, yes, I used to feel strongly about things in those days.

Well, you can imagine how excited I was! My first book just published; excellent reviews; New York, the hub of the universe . . . I met all sorts of interesting and exciting people, among them Helene. There were cocktail parties for the "brilliant" young writer—but I swear that it didn't go to my head, not really. Even before my three weeks' visit was up, I began to see some of the sham and it was with a feeling of relief that I came back to my small Florida campus and to the routine of teaching.

There goes the bell for lunch. I must hurry. Helene doesn't like me to be late. But first I must find a safe place to hide this, so that no one can find it.

Friday, July 13th

I'm going to be very busy for a while—until I work out my plan and make sure it is perfect. Every time Helene comes tripping by on her high heels—yes, she wears high heels even in the woods—every time Helene goes by, ostensibly for a walk but actually to listen for the sound of my typewriter, she will be pleased; a sly smile will accompany the airy wave she will give me as she passes my window. She likes to see Old Faithful at his desk. It keeps him occupied and reduces the fight left in him—at least, it has until now.

But from now on it will be different. Every day I will grow stronger, every day I will take another step on the path back to myself. It isn't too late. I can do it. I know I can do it. But first I must work out my plan: "How shall I kill her?"

Let me list the various ways that have occurred to me: poison, shooting, drowning (after all there is a lake outside the door), stabbing, choking, suffocating—that's enough to start with.

Let's begin with poison—something like an overdose of sleeping pills. Well, Helene never touches them. She sleeps like a baby, from the moment her head touches the pillow until one of the maids brings her breakfast to her in bed. Let's see, some subtle poison introduced in her after-dinner coffee? Come now, I'm getting ridiculous. That isn't the way at all. Obviously, it must look like an accident . . . I mustn't try to force myself to find an idea—as I've been doing so long with my stories. It would be better not to think too hard about it—just let my subconscious work on

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it and the plan will surely take form.

I know this is a battle to the death—either hers or mine. Helene never gives up. What she wants she gets, and what she has, she devours. But I will not let her devour me. She nearly has, but I can still escape. In fact, I am already escaping.

How did she trap me in the first place? How many hundreds of times I've asked myself that question! As I wrote yesterday, when I returned to Florida after my three weeks in New York, I was relieved and happy to get back to my simple apartment, to the routine of college, and to the new book I wanted to write. It was about a month later that Helene phoned me from Palm Beach where she had rented a house on the beach. I know now that she went to Florida that year for only one reason. I'm sure she decided the very first time we met to marry me and she played her cards with consummate skill. She threw a silken net over me, so soft, so yielding that I didn't feel its tensile strength until I was firmly caught in its mesh.

It was all so simple. At her invitation I visited her for a week-end, and then for another, and another—until it became an accepted pattern of my life. We talked about books and writing—oh, yes, in those days she was full of enthusiasm for my work. She was stimulating, provocative, and utterly feminine. But my second book never got started. Before Helene, week-ends had always been my own, the time I devoted to my writing; but here they were slipping through my fingers and I had not a page to show for them.

The school year was ending, so I wasn't too concerned. I knew I would have more than two months of total freedom for my book. That is when Helene told me about Great Bear Lake. Funny isn't it, that Great Bear played a role in the beginning just as it is going to play in the end.

She described the beauty and silence of the Adirondack woods and the "lake waters lapping by the shore." She made it sound like the most perfect place in the world in which to write—so I came up here, alone, to her camp. I didn't have this small room in the woods to work in then. No, she had me put in the best guest-room—a luxurious, demoralizing room.

The guide (whom she employs the year round) tended amply to my creature comforts but—well, the ideas for the book just didn't seem to jell. In the beginning I would get up early, take a short walk and a swim, then start at my typewriter before nine o'clock. By lunchtime I would have written and torn up a small sheaf of pages. By the time Helene came up a couple of weeks later I had already grown a little worried and tense about it.

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And then the social life started.

The house was crowded with guests every week-end. I found myself getting up a little later each morning, and then a little later still, until finally I wasn't ready for work until nearly noon. I think I still might have escaped—if she hadn't handled me so cleverly. One false move on her part, one ounce too much of pressure, would have sent me pelting back to Florida for good. But that's not Helene's way. She never forces you into anything.

That summer, in August, we were married. I remember the evening we became engaged.

"You'll write again, darling, more than you ever did." It was late and we were sitting on the sofa in front of the dying embers of the fire. I was discouraged and, by now, definitely panicky about my inability to work.

"No writer can create without the proper conditions," she went on. "Financial pressures, other obligations are death to a man of your nature. I've seen how worried you become. But if we were together, darling, I could give you everything you need. You'd never have to worry about anything again. Please, won't you propose to me?"

Her voice was infinitely tender, infinitely understanding; and in my panic I believed her.

Monday, July 16th

Three days have passed since the last time I was able to come to my little room in the woods. But that is typical of life with Helene. She pretends to be deeply interested in creating an atmosphere conducive to writing. And yet I have never seen anyone more callous to the inner needs of a writer. Nothing is too trivial to warrant an interruption, a postponement for days, for even weeks, of my work.

She has other ways of destroying a man too, subtle ways that are unbelievably corrosive.

"I'm *sure* you'll sell one of your stories soon. Just because so many have been turned down doesn't mean you'll *never* be able to sell another, does it?" And her voice and manner are those of a governess trying to soothe a fractious child. "Why don't you try to write book reviews? Perhaps that wouldn't be so hard for you. I hate to see you wear yourself out this way for really *nothing*."

The result is a slow, inevitable degradation of purpose, of the necessity to create. Take this week-end, for instance. I told her that I was hard at work on something really good. (Needless to say, I didn't tell her what plot I was working on!) Anyone with the slightest awareness could see that I was excited, that I was filled with a drive that had been absent in me for years. Helene saw it. She couldn't miss it. After all, she knows me pretty well. She must, in order to have succeeded so brilliantly in undermining me.

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And so—how did I spend most of my week-end? Taking her cousin's three young children fishing. They had never fished before. Their lines got tangled, the hooks got caught on the bottom. They quarreled incessantly and, I am sure, hated every minute of it. But for hour after hour on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday I had to row them around Great Bear Lake. The guide could have done it, but Helene claimed he was too busy. The children would have infinitely preferred to play on the beach and swim—but dutifully the four of us piled into the boat. They didn't catch a single fish. How could they? And yet each time the blame was indirectly put on my shoulders.

"Harry, I watched you for a while and I think you were rowing too fast. But, after all, Harry's not much of a fisherman, are you, darling?" Or: "Harry, I don't understand why you didn't take them over by Wildwood Landing. That's where the best fishing is."

But the funny thing—I should say, the wonderful thing—was my own reaction. A month ago, even a week ago, I would have retired into my dream world, into my Walter Mitty self. But actually I almost enjoyed this past week-end—for the first time none of it touched me at all! I watched everything and everybody with complete objectivity.

During the first years of our marriage I had reacted with wild bitterness and anger. I would shout and rant and even threaten to leave.

"And what would you live on, dear?" she would smile quietly. "Don't tell me you plan to go back to teaching again. Do you think you could find a job at this time of year? And you can hardly live on what you've been earning from your writing, now can you?"

Knowing she was right only made my anger more explosive. "I'll write, you'll see. I'll write a best seller and be free of you." I would dash from the room and almost fling myself at my typewriter; but after hours of gradually diminishing frenzy all I would have to show were pages and pages, pathetically torn to bits on the floor.

Gradually the years whittled down my energy until only escape in dreams seemed possible—that is, until last week. Now I know, with the deepest possible conviction, that nothing will deter or deflect me from my present task—to discover how I shall kill her. Let her have her last fling at triumph, at mastery. I shall win in the end.

I have had time to do some hard thinking as to ways and means. The old subconscious is getting to work. It seems to me at the moment that the most practical method would be an accident on the lake. The Adirondack guide boat is rather tippy, almost as unstable as a canoe. I used to love paddling and was rather good at it. Why don't I get out my old canoe? It was a real

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beauty, light as a feather, fast and slick. It would serve even better than a guide boat for an "accidental" drowning, and it might be rather fun to do some paddling again. I must admit I've not taken much exercise the last few years, and have put on quite a few pounds here and there.

The more I think of it, the more I like it. It's really a wonderful idea.

I think I'll go down to the boathouse right now.

Tuesday, July 17th

I'm a little stiff today. That's natural though. I haven't had that much exercise in a long time. Rowing a boat for fishing, as I did last week-end, can hardly be called exercise. All you do is give an occasional flick to the oars, just enough to keep the boat moving.

But I feel well, I must say. Really well. I slept better too. You see how things are beginning to shape up? I knew it. I knew it the minute I decided to kill Helene. Everything is going to be perfect—what is called "the perfect crime."

It was while I was out on the lake yesterday that more of the plan came to me. I paddled almost to the far end of the lake, nearly three miles. The Howards have a camp down there, on the east side of the lake—the only camp which does not have a road leading to it. You can reach it only by boat (or on foot, of course, but it's a seven-mile walk). Every year they give one big party, a real blowout. Everyone will be a little high—and accidents *will* happen, won't they?

Let us imagine that we are at the Howards' party—all of us, practically the entire population of the lake. The party begins to break up. We go down to the dock where there are lots of boats. People gang up, crowding three or even four into one of those unstable guide boats. They start off, some heading straight across toward the clubhouse or the camps at the lower end of the lake, others heading along the shore before cutting across to the north end where we are.

Doesn't seem a likely time or place for an "accident," does it? Too many people about. I would have to shout for help, and help would be too close at hand. People can sober up very fast under a shock.

No, somehow Helene and I will have to leave later than the others, so there will be no chance of help reaching us too soon. I'll have to think of some excuse that will keep us at the Howards', delay our departure. Suppose I pass out? No, then someone would stay to row or paddle us home. Besides, it shouldn't be anything out of the ordinary . . .

Well, I'll think of it. I don't need to worry about a little detail like that. Everything is formulating so well, I can't possibly miss.

There is one thing, however, I

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must do—and I must do it over and over again until I'm absolutely sure of it. You see, obviously there has to be something that we run into, something that "makes" us tip over. I remembered the buoys they use for the sailing races. One of them lies almost in a direct line between our camp and where we would cut out onto the lake if we were paddling home from the Howards'. I've got to manage to reach that point, or somewhere near it. And it will be dark. But I think I can line up a particular tree that would be visible against the sky, even if there isn't a moon. I must try it.

But to get back to the plan. There we are, Helene and I. We've left the Howards' camp after the others—long enough so there won't be the slightest chance that any of them will be near us. Helene is in the front of the canoe, her back to me. As I am considerably heavier than she, there will be a sandbag on the floor in the bow of the canoe—ballast. She will make her usual pretense of paddling and I will steer straight toward the buoy. By then I will have practised the route till I can estimate my position perfectly.

Now, I don't want there to be any struggle or take any chance of failing. If I just tip over the canoe I could easily lose her in the dark, and that would never do. She'll have to be unconscious before she falls into the water.

Let me visualize it. The canoe moves swiftly along in the dark water, and I can see Helene's silhouette in front of me. I take off my shoes, dig in with four or five deep strokes to get the canoe moving really fast. Then, with a hand on either side, I steal forward, brace myself, and bring down the heavy end of my paddle on her skull.

I can see it so clearly. She goes limp, the canoe rocks a little as I hoist her up and let her slip easily over the side. There has been virtually no sound. I slide into the water, holding the canoe with one hand, and then, as quietly as I can, I tip it over. I wait a few minutes before I begin to shout and splash and call for help. No help can reach us in time, and the job is done.

You know, that plan doesn't sound bad—not bad at all. I'll give it a day or two to jell in my mind and then go over it again. If it still looks good, then I'll really work out every detail with a fine-tooth comb.

Wednesday, July 18th

I can hardly believe what I did yesterday after I stopped writing. I almost hesitate to put it down. It's embarrassing for a man to admit that after eight years he suddenly sits down and reads his own book. Not only does he read it, but as he reads he laughs out loud at times, and at other moments he finds tears coming into his eyes.

Can you even imagine such an experience? Reading again, after so many years and such an immense

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inner distance, the words that you yourself set down in the white heat of younger days. I was moved, inexpressibly moved, and elated too. It *is* a good book, and it has lost none of its force with the lapse of time. It's not dated one bit. It's fresh and strong and original. I didn't realize I could once write like that—or perhaps I had forgotten it.

At any rate, it came over me with an overwhelming impact. I'm even more ashamed to admit that I read it through twice—and enjoyed it just as much, if not more, the second time. Yes. I came back here after supper, in spite of Helene's protests that I was needed for bridge. I simply walked out, came up here, and locked the door on the inside.

I like this room in the evening. I pulled down all the shades and as it was a little chilly, I lit the Adirondack stove. I moved the lamp over by the wicker settee, which is really quite comfortable if you fix the cushions right. It was late when I finished the book the second time, for I read much more slowly this time. It must have been nearly two o'clock. Helene was probably angry, but I really didn't care. Afterward, I just sat for a long time, smoking, filled somehow with an enormous sense of satisfaction.

By that time it was so late that I decided to roll up in the blanket and sleep here, right over there on that iron bed. It's not as comfortable as the beds Helene has down at the camp, but I slept like a baby and woke up completely refreshed. This morning I decided to do something else I haven't done in years—I went for a swim before breakfast. It was the most invigorating thing you can imagine. The water was icy cold and it swept away every last cobweb of sleep.

Yes, Helene was angry—angrier than I have seen her in years. But I simply took my breakfast tray from her room where I usually have it, and without a word walked downstairs and out onto the terrace. I didn't even bother to listen to what she was saying.

I think she is beginning to sense something. Not about my plan—she wouldn't dream of anything like that, but just that I'm changing somehow. I'm seeing her now as I never saw her before—a small, petty woman, superficial, spoiled and willful, accustomed to having her way in everything and ready to use any means to get her way. She's started to pick at me again, nagging at me constantly.

"Where have you been all day, Harry? After all, you're my husband, you should spend more time with me. I don't like being left alone like this. After all I've done for you I think you owe me a little more gratitude than you've been showing lately. Where would you be without me? Nowhere. You know that." And on and on. I don't bother to answer her at all.

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And she doesn't like it. She feels something is stirring in me and she's doing her best to goad me into losing my temper.

But she hasn't a chance—not a ghost of one! I just grin at her and think of my plan. It's driving her nearly crazy, for now *I'm* the one who just sits and smiles. You know, I actually enjoy these scenes, watching *her* struggle for a change; and when I've had enough, I simply get up and leave the room. It's a wonderful feeling.

I've just read over the plan as I wrote it out yesterday and I've spotted a big flaw. Hitting her with the paddle. First of all, it might cause a bad wound that would be hard to explain later, and next, there might be blood on the paddle and perhaps even on me. The lake water might wash the blood off—still I don't want to take any chances. I'll have to knock her out some other way.

Chloroform? No, that's no good either. Maybe the sandbag—or another small sandbag of my own. Isn't that supposed to be a lethal weapon? Sand poured into a sock. And it doesn't leave a bad contusion either—nothing more than could happen from hitting the edge of the canoe as it tipped.

Yes, that's a good idea. I can spill the sand out of the sock while I'm thrashing about in the water calling for help, and simply stuff the empty sock into my pocket. No sense taking the risk of dropping the whole thing in the lake where someone might find it when they dive for her body.

The plan is beginning to shape up, isn't it? Neat. Precise. I'm beginning to feel completely detached about the whole thing. Calm. Perfectly secure. Nevertheless, I'll go over and over it—to make absolutely sure. But I know I'm on the right track—the old mind is beginning to work again.

Thursday, July 19th

You know, I can scarcely get to my typewriter quickly enough these mornings. So many things are happening and I can't wait to get them all down on paper. Yesterday afternoon I went up to the club for the mail and who do you think was there? Simon Adams. I haven't seen him in years—not since that last year in Florida when he and I would sit up half the night talking about literature and what we were going to do. Of course, I've been reading about Simon. He had his fourth book published last spring.

You know how there are some people you can take up with just where you left off years before? Well, that was the way it was with Simon and me. He is up here visiting the Bancrofts but Simon has always been a pretty free agent wherever he is. He came down to the camp right after dinner and I took him to my cabin where we sat up and talked just as we used to.

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He didn't talk down to me or throw his weight around. Instead, he drew me out about my own ideas and my own work. I haven't had such an interesting time since I can remember. He also talked about a lot of the new books which I haven't read and gave me a list of the best ones. I'm sending off for them today—obviously, I have a lot of reading to catch up with.

And one other thing that I scarcely dare write about, let alone think about. You know how it is when you talk with someone whose mind is wholly congenial with your own. Well, ideas begin to germinate, to sprout, and you find yourself saying and thinking all sorts of things that seem to have sprung from nowhere. So it was last night, and I found myself talking of a new book, a book that I plan to write. I can scarcely believe it—a book *I* plan to write!

Friday, July 20th

Yes, it is Friday and Helene is having the usual influx of guests for the week-end; but I told her I was too busy to dance attendance on them. I can scarcely believe what has happened in one short week. Last Friday I was rowing those brats around the lake most of the afternoon. How could I have permitted myself to do such a thing?

It's lucky I did some more thinking yesterday about the new book I have in mind, because Simon called today and said he's coming over again on Sunday; he wants me to work up an outline of my idea. I'm a little scared and tense about it, but I guess that's natural after all these years of frustration. The best thing is simply not to worry or think about it, just to plunge in and get started. After all, I have only two days in which to finish it, so I'd better get to work right away.

Monday, July 23rd

Simon liked my outline for the new book!

Of course, it's only the barest skeleton as yet, but he was very encouraging about it and seems to take it for granted that I'm going to write it.

I worked like a dog on the details, but it didn't tire me a bit. It's funny, but I seem to be able to concentrate again—and for long stretches of time and without my attention or purpose wavering. I did just what I said I would do—I didn't think or worry about whether I was going to be *able* to do it; I just sat down and did it. It started slowly, but began to go faster and faster as I went along, and I had it all worked out by the time Simon got here yesterday. I admit I was a little tired last night, but it was a healthy fatigue, and I woke up this morning completely refreshed.

I've moved up to my cabin entirely now. There is a small closet off the bathroom big enough for

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my needs and I've got myself a little electric hot plate so that I can make coffee if I want it. I've been skipping a few meals lately, but it seems to agree with me. I can't remember when I felt better.

Helene is beginning to look a little pinched and is now trying the silent treatment on me. It suits me perfectly as I have nothing to say to her anyway. I have more important things to think of than to worry about how Helene is feeling.

I seem to be able to get along with less and less sleep. I've been swimming every morning and go out at least twice a day for a long paddle. By the way, I found the tree that will guide me right to the buoy. I've taken my belt in a couple of notches and have cut down on my smoking. I don't drink any cocktails before dinner, nor any highballs after. In fact, I seem to have gone on the wagon without having made any actual decision to do so.

I keep coming back to the idea for my new book. Simon thinks it's really good, and I know him well enough to know he means what he says. My only worry now is—can I write it, really write it? If there were only some way that I could be sure.

Simon left last night on the midnight train to New York and plans to fly to Europe today for a three months' stay in Greece. He suggested that I send him the manuscript as I write it, but that's not what I want. It would take so long to send it and get it back, piece by piece, and then to try to discuss it all by letter. No, what I want is something—well, something quick and *professional*. Something that will tell me once and for all whether I can write again.

I'm going to get to work on the book and see how it goes. I'm nervous about it—but I'll try to put that out of my mind and just plunge in. That's what I have to do—plunge in.

Tuesday, July 24th

I took a fresh piece of paper yesterday, rolled it into the typewriter, and wrote the magic words: *Chapter One*. And then I began to shake. I did my best to put my fears out of my mind. I went over and over the things Simon had said to me—about my outline and about my abilities as a writer. But I was still shaking. I guess you don't get over eight years of failure so fast. But I didn't let myself panic. I sat down on the settee and thought everything through, carefully and objectively.

A great deal has happened since I started writing this diary. One of the most striking is my present attitude toward Helene. I see very little of her these days and don't even think of her. I've been much too busy with my new book. Can it be that I am already free of her? Nothing she says or does seems to touch me at all any more. But the

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only way I can be sure I've escaped her completely is to know that I can write a publishable story again. As I said yesterday, what I need now is a *professional* reaction to my writing.

I read over this diary I've been writing for the past twelve days. I'm going to change names and places a little—not too much, just enough so that "Great Bear" could be any one of a dozen places in the Adirondacks. It's clear what I'm planning to do, isn't it? You see I've got a lot of Irish in me, and quite a bit of superstition along with it. It will be like flipping a coin, or asking for a sign.

I'll send these diary entries out as a story—under a pseudonym of course, and using a post-office box in some other town so that no one can guess who I really am. If it is accepted for publication, then I'll know that I'm really back on the track, that I *can* write, that Helene will never be able to touch me again, no matter what happens.

Then I really wouldn't have to kill her, would I? The knowledge that I can still write a publishable story would give me the confidence in myself that I must have to make a success of my next book.

But suppose the story is turned down. What then?

Well, nothing will be lost—not really. I was talking to Bill Howard the other day and I gather they are planning to have their annual party the last Saturday in August. That will give me plenty of time.

Don't think I'm joking. I'm not. I'm in real, deadly earnest. If I find that Helene's corroding influence is still operating, that I'm still headed toward failure, that these pages are *not* publishable—then I shall kill her. My plan is perfect and I mean to be free of Helene, one way or the other.

So I'll toss this figurative coin, ask for a sign, and let Fate, in the form of the Editor, decide.

Shall I kill Helene, or not?

Editor, the answer is up to you.

EDITORS' NOTE: *What a question to ask a mystery editor! What a spot to put a crime editor in! For the first time in the 22-year history of EQMM we have the feeling—no, the conviction!—that by accepting and publishing a story we have saved a person's life! . . . So, dear reader, we ask* you *a question: what else could we have done?*

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If ever a man had cause to swear vengeance, it was Martin Aylward, the old archer who had fought so nobly in the Crusade . . .

THE DEVIL WILL SURELY COME

by ARTHUR PORGES

MARTIN AYLWARD, HELPLESS TO interfere, watched as they burned his young wife at the stake. She was to have been given the small mercy of strangulation before the flames engulfed her; but the executioner had bungled. The fire had spread too quickly, so the craven, afraid of a scorching, had jumped free without first putting Martin's wife out of her terror. Luckily she was so exhausted and weak from the preliminary examinations, and from the imprisonment and trial, that she died almost as soon as the flames sprung up.

Martin stared straight ahead, his face a stone. After a lifetime of war, much of it the horrible butchery that had taken place in France, he was inured to all things. Inside, he was screaming with Elizabeth, but outwardly he did not move a muscle. John Pippin, the castle steward, had tried hard to implicate Martin with his wife, but Sir Walter Harcourt would not have it. He pointed out that Aylward had proved during the Crusade that he was no servant of the devil. Nobody had sent more or deadlier shafts into the paynims, who were surely allies of the Evil One. Father James had also done his best to save Martin's wife. But the abbot was a cousin of the steward, and believed the man's lies; and no village priest could prevail against an abbot.

As for the Lord of the castle, Sir Harry Peacock, he didn't really care if both were burned. Martin was sixty now, and while no archer in the shire could shoot a more accurate or smoother shaft, the strength of youth was gone. In his prime Martin had sent an arrow five hundred paces, winning a silver cup; but now the great shoulder muscles were withered by the passage of years. Martin Aylward was no longer fit for campaigns in the field—so let him burn, along with his witch of a wife.

Sir Harry was merely indifferent —Martin believed that all princes were like that. The real malice had originated with John Pippin, the steward. Martin had been foolish enough to protest when the fellow cheated honest bowmen out of their rations; and this was the steward's revenge—the swine!—to

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make a tale out of the whole cloth, and to cause the burning of an innocent girl . . .

The ravening flames died down—they had no power to hurt her any more. Tears prickled in Martin's eyes, but he blinked them away. There was no time for grief. There was time now only for vengeance.

John Pippin walked by, ostentatiously stepping wide of the bowman, as if to imply that Elizabeth had not been the only warlock in the Aylward family.

It would be so easy to snap the fellow's stringy neck—Martin's gnarled old hands still had that much strength in them. But so direct an act was not wise. There was still Martin's daughter, only three years old, to be considered. If he killed John Pippin, they would surely hang him. Then little Anne would be left without a relative in the world. She was a delicate child, and would never survive the scant care likely to be given the daughter of a witch and a murderer.

So Martin Aylward ignored the steward, turning instead to Sir Walter Harcourt, who gave him some rough words of consolation. The old knight had little enough influence these days, or Sir Harry might have denied the abbot, and saved Elizabeth.

When Sir Walter left, Father James approached, his ascetic face pale and downcast.

"I grieve for you, my son," he said. "She was guiltless as a child just born."

"Pippin lied," Martin said in a voice totally devoid of emotion.

"The Devil will surely come for him," the priest said with conviction. "Two times at the hearing he declared. 'May the Devil take me away if I say aught but the truth.'"

"And that while swearing he saw Elizabeth sail by his window on a besom, on her way to a Black Mass. And again when he told of her putting a spell on Lady Peacock's palfrey. Both lies—lies!"

"The Devil will surely come for him," Father James repeated. "The Father of Lies knows his own."

"He'll have to fly himself," Martin said bitterly, gesturing to the window of Pippin's tiny room, a hundred feet up the sheer wall of the castle.

There was irony in the situation, he thought grimly: once, long ago, Pippin had made it plain he didn't believe in the Devil; while Martin said bitterly, gesturing to the One's existence, although he was greatly puzzled that God allowed it . . .

That night, sitting in the little thatched hut assigned to a married archer, Martin held Anne in his arms and wondered about fleeing the castle. The steward would certainly try again, and the next time neither Sir Walter nor Father James might be able to save him. And then what would become of Anne?

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Then he remembered that the Devil was surely coming for John Pippin. How long would the Evil One wait? It shouldn't take more than a week should it? To be sure, the Devil had much other business, but not, in Martin's judgment, a more pressing engagement.

Yet two weeks passed with no sign of Satan's claiming his own. Father James, secure in his office, did not hesitate to spread the word that Pippin had lied. "The Devil will surely call on him," he told everybody in his parish. Finally, he was ordered by the Bishop to desist —Abbot Thomas was still looking after his cousin.

One morning, sixteen days after Elizabeth Aylward had been burned, the castle awoke to a startling discovery. Beginning at ground level, and going straight up the sheer wall for a hundred feet, there was a string of foot prints leading directly to the window of John Pippin's room. There was not the slightest doubt as to their nature—only a cloven hoof could have made such a trail.

A few of the bolder men examined the prints near the bottom, only to spring back in horror. The blackish marks reeked of brimstone.

John Pippin hurried down as the news spread, saw the line of prints, and turned chalk-white, his small, pursy mouth twisting.

"It's a trick!" he gasped finally. "I saw nothing—I heard nothing."

"Trick, eh?" said a man-at-arms, spitting. "I'd like to see the man who could walk up a wall like that."

"A rope from the top," Pippin cried.

"I'll take my oath nobody was on those battlements last night—only the sentry," declared the Captain of the Guard.

"That's no trick," another man muttered. "Smell the brimstone!"

"Father James told us the Devil would come for you—if you lied about the girl."

"I did not lie!"

"You did lie," said a calm voice. It belonged to Martin Aylward. "Captain, shouldn't you tell Sir Harry about this?"

"Aye, that I should."

"No! For the love of heaven!" Pippin shrieked. "He won't understand that it's a trick. Don't tell Sir Harry—please!"

"Risk my neck for you?" the Captain snorted. "Think I'd be wanting fifty lashes?" He marched off, commanding a subordinate, "Keep him here!"

Martin's cool gray eyes met those of the steward, and the steward's were wild with fear.

"Better Sir Harry than the Devil," Martin said. "Next time he won't stop at the window."

"It's a trick!" Pippin repeated hoarsely. "But—oh, my God, I'll burn!"

"As well here as in hell," Martin assured him, and turned away.

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Martin Aylward watched the burning of John Pippin. Not even the abbot had dared to interfere, so strong was public opinion in the matter. There was no gainsaying those incredible devil-tracks up a sheer vertical wall one hundred feet high.

And why would the Devil come, except for the steward's own invitation at Elizabeth's trial? Pippin had lied; one of God's children had been burned as a servant of Satan. If there was really such a servant in their midst, it must be the steward himself. Even Sir Harry, to whom no commoner really mattered, was appalled by such a miscarriage of justice. Sternly he vetoed the abbot's weak suggestion that Pippin be strangled before burning . . .

That night, with little Anne watching wide-eyed in the dim light of a rush-lamp, Martin Aylward destroyed every vestige of the Devil's hoof. He had made it from a bit of thick velvet, with a heavy nap, once part of the collar of Sir Harry's cloak—a material ideally suited to the old archer's need.

The spongy fabric held enough muddy solution of molasses and brimstone to make several marks. He had fitted it to his best arrow, a straight one with a swine-cut goose feather. The rest was the fruit of more than forty years as a master bowman.

All the prints higher than his reach he had made by careful precision shooting—such as only Martin in the whole shire could have achieved. Again and again in the moonlight—pausing only when the sentry high above on the battlements marched by—Martin had released the flawlessly controlled shaft, pulling the arrow back after each shot by means of a stout woollen thread.

Every shot had struck within half an inch of the chosen point, leaving a trail that could not have been more convincing if the Devil had actually strode up the side of the castle. After every four prints, Martin redipped the velvet pad in the pot of sticky compound, and then aimed a little higher . . .

In his heart Martin explained to Satan: no doubt the Evil One would have finally come on his inevitable errand, but there was too much danger in waiting. John Pippin might have managed to destroy Martin first—it was to protect Anne that the simple bowman dared to anticipate the Devil.

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The American Hero and the American City

The nonfiction piece that follows is Chapter IV, called "The City," from a forthcoming book titled DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS A MAN MUST GO: Raymond Chandler's Knight. *The book was written by Philip Durham of the English faculty of UCLA, and will be published by The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (projected publication date: November 1963). The publisher describes the book as "a most perceptive study, not only of the art of one of the foremost practitioners of the detective story of our time, but also of the culture that produced him."*

Do you recall how Raymond Chandler characterized his hero-detective, Philip Marlowe, at the end of "The Simple Art of Murder"?

". . . But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid . . . He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure . . . If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and yet not too dull to be worth living in."

That is Raymond Chandler's hero-detective—or detective-hero.

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The short piece that follows is Raymond Chandler's and Philip Marlowe's city—the city in which the Chandler hero-detective worked and walked, loved and lived—and sought a "hidden truth." And (sometimes called by other names in his novels and novelets) it was peculiarly his city—as San Francisco was Dashiell Hammett's city, as London was Sherlock Holmes's, and Paris, Georges Simenon's (and Maurice Leblanc's before him), and New York and Wrightsville, E.Q.'s city and town . . . And by the way: would you like to know Raymond Chandler's opinion of New York City? He once referred to New York as a "dirty, lawless, rude, hard-boiled place" which made even Los Angeles seem "civilized" . . .

We do not often, as you know, include nonfiction in EQMM, but we think you will find this short excerpt from a new study of Raymond Chandler—Los Angeles through the Chandler eyes—both interesting and revealing . . .

L.A., U.S.A.— *as Raymond Chandler Saw It*

by PHILIP DURHAM

RAYMOND CHANDLER'S HONEYmoon with Hollywood was over and his love affair with Los Angeles was on the wane; but when he had originally gone to Los Angeles to live he had thought of the city as an exciting place, and when he began to write about it in 1933 it was still full of interest and the challenge of humanity. Through the years the detective-hero Philip Marlowe—by seeing beyond the brightly colored façade and by going down the mean streets in the rear—had brought Los Angeles to the attention of the world. Perhaps it was only Marlowe's city, but it had reality.

From the realities of Los Angeles, Aldous Huxley created a fantasy; from the fantasies of Los Angeles, Raymond Chandler created a reality. Huxley probably delighted in a saying of the 1930's that Los Angeles was six suburbs in search of a city. Perhaps Chandler did too, but to Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Pasadena, and elsewhere he added a state of mind—made up of beautiful blonde women and lonely men, the wealth of Bel Air and the sadness of Bunker Hill, the blooming jacarandas and the waving poinsettias, the city lights from the hills and the "hard pale wild lilac" color of the Cali-

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fornia hills as seen from the city.

A few years ago a story was told of an English girl arriving in Los Angeles for the first time. She was picked up at the railway station by her host who drove her through downtown Los Angeles on the way to his home in Westwood Village. The English girl made no comment as she observed the civic buildings and the streets filled with more automobiles than the sidewalks with pedestrians. But suddenly she shouted, "Wilshire Boulevard!" The host, unable to account for so much enthusiasm over Wilshire, looked to the girl for an explanation. Wilshire, the visitor said, was one of the most frequently traveled streets in Raymond Chandler's stories, and now that she was on it she was oriented and was at home in the city.

When Christopher Isherwood once professed an admiration for Chandler's work, he was asked the reason. His answer was that almost no one in our time can picture the personality and feeling of a city with the vividness of Chandler. And writing on Chandler in "The Nation," George P. Elliott gave the opinion that "If you want the feel and aspect of Los Angeles and vicinity during the thirties, forties, and early fifties, you could hardly do better than to read his fictions."

When Raymond Chandler deserted Los Angeles for a small beach town in 1946, it was the signal for Philip Marlowe to turn against the big city which had once been so challenging. In *The Little Sister* (1949) he was to grumble his way west on Sunset Boulevard while being swallowed up by "racetrack drivers who were pushing their mounts hard to get nowhere and do nothing." As drivers honked at him, yelled at him, and cut in on him, he began talking to himself: "I used to like this town. A long time ago. There were trees along Wilshire Boulevard. Beverly Hills was a country town. Westwood was bare hills and lots offering at eleven hundred dollars and no takers. Hollywood was a bunch of frame houses on the inter-urban line. Los Angeles was just a big dry sunny place with ugly homes and no style, but goodhearted and peaceful." But now all of the homey attractiveness had gone, having given way to pansy decorators, Lesbian dress designers, riffraff of a "big hard-boiled city with no more personality than a paper cup"—a city without the "individual bony structure" a real city must have.

In the old days Philip Marlowe had driven along that same Sunset Boulevard on a "crisp morning with just enough snap in the air to make life seem simple and sweet." On the way back down the coast from Malibu he had driven on a highway washed clean by the rain; on his left were low rolling hills of "yellow-white sand traced with pink moss"; on his right the gulls

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were wheeling and swooping over something in the surf. Marlowe was on his way into the city to do his bit for the betterment of society, and willingly.

Wherever the hero went he vividly described what he saw—the streets, houses, yards, weather, and people—and no detail was too small to escape his observant eye. He never saw merely a car but a four-door, gray, '36 Plymouth sedan; not an ice cream truck but the Good Humor man in his blue and white wagon, playing "Turkey in the Straw" on his music box; not a butterfly landing on a flower but a large black and gold butterfly fish-tailing in and landing on a hydrangea bush, moving its wings slowly up and down a few times and then taking off heavily and staggering away through the motionless hot scented air; not simply rain but rain that hit the window, flattened out, and slid down in a thick wave like melted gelatine; not merely a girl but one sitting stiffly erect, with knees close together, chin level, bright teeth shining between parted lips, mad eyes wide open as she sat on a fringed orange shawl on a teakwood chair, and wore nothing but a pair of long jade earrings which probably cost a couple of hundred dollars.

As Marlowe moved back and forth across the city, its suburbs, and adjacent towns, his reaction to each area depended largely on his relationship to or feeling about, at that time, a section of humanity. The fact that the hero appeared really to care about the people and their plights, to be sensitive to each little detail of their lives and surroundings, provided an intimacy between the reader and the city.

On the eastern edge of Los Angeles was Pasadena where, during the early years of the twentieth century, there came the retired couples from the middle west to build a "wealthy close-mouthed provincial town." A house typical of the kind they lived in was the one in the Oak Noll section—"a big solid cool-looking house with burgundy brick walls, a terra cotta tile roof, and a white stone trim." The front downstairs windows were leaded, and the upstairs windows were of the "cottage type and had a lot of rococo imitation stonework trimming around them." From the house "a half acre or so of fine green lawn drifted in a gentle slope down to the street, passing on the way an enormous deodar around which it flowed like a cool green tide around a rock."

Marlowe, always one to note the kinds of flowers and trees that went with a house and its inhabitants, pointed out three white acacias "that were worth seeing." It was a nice cool day for Pasadena, in that pre-smog era, but there "was a a heavy scent of summer on the morning and everything that grew was perfectly still in the breathless air."

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The outside of a house introduced the reader to the kind of people he would soon meet; the inside told him about the people in an explicit manner. A room in the Pasadena house was, for example, "large and square and sunken and cool and had the restful atmosphere of a funeral chapel and something of the same smell. Tapestry on the blank roughened stucco walls, iron grilles imitating balconies outside high windows, heavy carved chairs with plush seats and tapestry backs and tarnished gilt tassels hanging down their sides. At the back a stained-glass window about the size of a tennis court." It was an "old musty, fusty, narrow-minded, clean and bitter room" and, the reader eventually discovered, not at all unlike its inhabitant, Mrs. Murdock.

Immediately to the east of Pasadena, in Raymond Chandler's day, began the orange grove country. From the highway one saw the "fat straight rows of orange trees spin by." Even at night in a heavy rain the "drenched darkness" could not hide the "flawless lines of the orange trees wheeling away like endless spokes into the night."

Continuing along the highway with Marlowe, one traveled the long slope south of San Dimas, over the ridge and down into Pomona—the ultimate end of the fog belt, and "the beginning of that semi-desert region where the sun is as light and dry as old sherry in the morning, as hot as a blast furnace at noon, and drops like an angry brick at nightfall." Only a few miles beyond Pomona was Ontario where Marlowe turned north in order to travel along Euclid and its "five miles of the finest grevillea trees in the world."

As Marlowe neared San Bernardino it became hotter, almost unbearably so, but only a few minutes later, climbing directly up into the mountains, it began to cool off, and within an hour or two Marlowe was above the cities in the area of Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear Lake, in the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Back in the city the next morning, Marlowe dropped by his office on Sunset and Ivar, a block west of Vine. Like the detective, the office was simple and uncluttered. Four chairs, a desk, a phone, washbowl, and five green filing cases (three empty) were the contents of the room. The special Marlowe touches were the net curtains at the open windows and the wall calendar. The curtains "puckered in and out like the lips of a toothless old man sleeping." The calendar that year had a Rembrandt, "a smeary self-portrait due to imperfectly registered color plates." Mr. Rembrandt's face was "aging, saggy, full of the disgust of life and the thickening effects of liquor," but it had a "hard cheerfulness" which appealed to the private eye. While Marlowe sat deep in contemplation,

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a "wedge of sunlight slipped over the edge of the desk and fell noiselessly to the carpet"; then the telephone rang. A new day and a new case.

Coming out of his office onto Sunset Boulevard, Marlowe was on one of the city's oldest and longest thoroughfares. In the old days Sunset had been a wagon road which started down at the pueblo and wandered gently west by northwest along the "solid, uneven, comfortable line of the foothills" for twenty-two miles to the sea. Today, following the same route, the detective headed west, curved through the Strip, drove by the antique shops, the "windows full of point lace and ancient pewter," the night clubs, a "drive-in lunch which somehow didn't belong," speeded up a bit along the "cool quiet of Beverly Hills where the bridle path divides the boulevard," noticed the University on his left as he went by, soon skirted the huge green polo field, and a few minutes later turned right into the foothills.

In the foothills along Sunset Boulevard were thousands of homes or mansions in which lived the rich, one of Marlowe's most formidable antagonists. With few exceptions—old General Sternwood or the tough, gutty movie queen Mavis Weld—the rich symbolized much of the city's evil. They cut themselves off from the people by living behind twelve-foot walls with a "special brand of sunshine, very quiet, put up in noiseproof containers just for the upper classes." If the outsider could get inside he could see two or more late-model Buicks, one or two limousines, and at least one canary-yellow convertible looking about "as inconspicuous as a privy on the front lawn."

If it were the Grayle estate, one would look beyond the parking space to a sunken garden with a fountain at each of the four corners. The entrance would be barred by a wrought-iron gate with a flying Cupid in the middle. There would be a pool with stone water-lilies in it and a big stone bullfrog sitting on one of the leaves. Off to one side there would be a wild garden with a sundial in the corner near an angle of wall that was built to look like a ruin. The house would not be much—smaller than Buckingham Palace and with fewer windows than the Chrysler Building. Inside there would be a long, quiet hall where flies dared not buzz. One room would have walls of dull painted parchment, and in front of the fireplace would be "a rug as thin as silk and as old as Aesop's aunt."

Leaving the Grayle residence, Marlowe looked across the street to see, in a stiff, white uniform, a man climbing into his panel truck labeled Infant Service. The uniformed man, Marlowe assumed, had just dropped by to change a diaper. A day with the rich was disconcerting, and it was a relief to

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get back to the office with its "homey smell of dust and tobacco smoke, the smell of a world where men live, and keep on living."

On another day Marlowe went into the old, lost, shabby area of Bunker Hill, to deal with the poor and lonely. The day here was just as depressing as the one with the rich but the private eye was more sympathetic and less cynical. In Bunker Hill there remained a few signs to show that it was once the choice residential part of Los Angeles—mainly the old Gothic mansions with full-corner bay windows and spindle turrets. And rising from Hill Street there still operated the funny little funicular railway called Angels Flight on which the old people rode up the steep embankment, people too worn out to climb the steps carrying their bread and potatoes. The old mansions were now shabby apartment houses, and on the front porches sat old men staring at nothing, "old men with faces like lost battles." From out of these dilapidated mansions came "women who should be young but have faces like stale beer." The neighborhood implied a nastiness, and death on these mean streets was mean indeed.

Not all the nastiness was, of course, relegated to Bunker Hill. There was, for example, A. G. Geiger's pornographic bookshop situated in a prominent spot on Hollywood Boulevard near Las Palmas, and from which "rare and half-rare smut books" were loaned for as high as ten dollars a day—"to the right people." In Santa Monica, Dr. Sonderborg ran a sanatorium where he cared for dope addicts and, for a nice fee, hid out hoods on the lam. Up in the foothills in one of the mansions a Psychic Consultant bilked the psychologically sick and silly. The Consultant admitted that he was a quack in a sensitive profession, but he was working in a "paradise of fakers." To Philip Marlowe he was one of the offensive people who were changing Los Angeles from the city the detective had once liked. "Give him enough time and pay him enough money and he'll cure anything from a jaded husband to a grasshopper plague. He would be an expert in frustrated love affairs, women who slept alone and didn't like it, wandering boys and girls who didn't write home . . . but mostly it would be women, fat women that panted and thin women that burned, old women that dreamed and young women that thought they might have Electra complexes, women of all sizes, shapes, and ages, but with one thing in common—money."

On another side of the city to the south lived sodden Jessie Florian in a house much like herself—"a dried-out brown house with a dried-out brown lawn in front of it." There the afternoon breeze "made the unpruned shoots of last year's poinsettias tap-tap against the

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cracked stucco wall." And Jessie's yellowish half-washed clothes fluttered on a rusty wire in the yard.

Out west in Santa Monica, however, there were streets of arching pepper trees which met above to form a green tunnel; a yard with tea rose begonias and a scarlet climbing rose; "old houses brooding under old trees." Somewhere nearby would be a "bed of winter sweet peas and a bronze-green hummingbird prodding in them delicately."

In Santa Monica, too, lived Anne Riordan in a house equal to her personality. Her living room had a "tan figured rug, white and rose chairs, a black marble fireplace with very tall brass andirons," but there was nothing womanish in the room except a full-length mirror. Marlowe once knew another girl who liked Santa Monica, but he did not like her because she refused to be aware of the town's Mexican and Negro slums, the waterfront dives, the sweaty little dance halls, and the pimps and pansies on the boardwalk.

In Raymond Chandler's day houses were appearing on precarious spots in the hills along the coast: "a couple of dozen houses of various sizes hanging by their eyebrows to the side of a mountain, and looking as if a good sneeze would drop them down among the box lunches on the beach." Driving on down the coast the detective passed through a series of "dank beach towns with shack-like houses built down on the sand." It was depressing, especially at night, when "the smell of kelp came in off the water, and the world was a wet emptiness."

Returning to Los Angeles through Beverly Hills, the city within a city, was a relief, for although the houses represented a lot of money they were "not loud." And after all, "Beverly Hills is Beverly Hills," the home of Hollywood stars.

Whether Chandler was pleased with his city or disgusted with it, he never failed to portray it with a detailed kind of descriptive intimacy. In the spring there were those clear, bright "summer mornings," when the hills were green and the snow could be seen on the high mountains. In the autumn a Santa Ana wind came down off the desert through the mountain passes, making the skin itch, the nerves jump, and the inside of the nostrils feel tight and drawn. In summer Marlowe frequently noticed "a touch of that peculiar tomcat smell that eucalyptus trees give off in warm weather." The mornings were all "blue and gold" with the birds in the ornamental trees "crazy with song after the rain." At evening the detective looked up from the city streets as "darkness prowls slowly on the hills."

In the end Los Angeles turned out to be a department store, smelling "stale and old like a living

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room that had been closed too long." But in that city there was still a "forgotten drugstore that slept behind two giant pepper trees and a dusty cluttered window." And if one looked closely as he drove into the hills off Sunset Boulevard he could still see the "heat bouncing off the seared clay bank at whose edge a few unbeatable wild-flowers clawed and hung on like naughty children who won't go to bed." The picture and pulse of the city had been so described that the reader on his first visit had a haunting feeling that he had been there before.

On January 12, 1946 Chandler wrote, to Alfred Knopf, that he was technically suspended from the studio for refusing to perform under a contract. "There is no moral issue involved since the studios have destroyed the moral basis of contracts themselves." At the same time he wrote to Hamish Hamilton, his publisher in London, that "we are all semi-literates over here," further complaining that "if a book is not 'significant' we think it trash. And by significant we mean that it does our thinking for us." And in the late summer the Chandlers moved down the coast to La Jolla. Los Angeles had become a "tired old whore."

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MURDER DE LUXE

by HUGH PENTECOST

(continued from page 22)

Like Pierre Chambrun, Jerry Dodd had developed his own sensitive antenna. He moved cautiously to the table and without touching either glass he bent down and sniffed. He was frowning when he straightened up. He looked at Mr. Fisher's face and his frown deepened. Then he took out his handkerchief, dropped it over the telephone receiver, and picked up the phone.

"Jerry Dodd here," he said to the operator. "Get me Mr. Chambrun, and then call the Precinct House and see if you can get Lieutenant Hardy. We got a dead one up here."

"At once, Mr. Dodd," said the operator's emotionless voice.

Seconds later Chambrun answered. "What is it, Jerry?"

"Dead one in 1208, Mr. Chambrun. Fellow named Fisher. Left a wake-me for seven this morning but didn't answer it. D.N.D. outside his door. But the maid could hear the TV playing. Mrs. Kniffen called me and I just came in. Suicide—maybe."

"Maybe?" Chambrun asked, cool and undisturbed.

"Poison. I'd guess strychnine. But two glasses. Most of a quart of bourbon gone. So he had a visitor. Maybe Fisher hung the D.N.D. outside his door, maybe his visitor did. Doc Partridge is on his way and I've phoned the cops."

"Okay, Jerry," Chambrun said cheerfully. "Hold the fort. I'll be right up."

In his office Chambrun sipped the last of a cup of Turkish coffee, glanced inside his silver case to make sure he had cigarettes, and picked up his phone.

"Mr. Atterbury at the front desk, please," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Chambrun?" Atterbury said in a moment.

"Who was Mr. Fisher in 1208?" Chambrun asked.

"'Was', sir?"

"'Was', Mr. Atterbury."

"One moment, sir." And in one moment: "Mr. Paul Fisher was a private detective, sir."

Chambrun's mouth hardened. "How did we happen to let him register, Atterbury?"

"Letter of introduction from Senator Farrand, sir," Atterbury said promptly. Only such an introduction would justify allowing a private detective to register in the hotel possibly to spy on one of its guests.

"Why wasn't I made aware of this, Atterbury?"

Atterbury's brief silence sounded flustered. He was obviously studying the registration card. "I'm sorry, sir. He registered the night Carl Nevers was off for his brother's wedding. I suppose the relief man expected Nevers would make the report, sir, and Nevers—"

"—thought the relief man would make it," Chambrun said impatiently. "We don't run a successful hotel on thoughts of that kind, Atterbury. Not your fault, but make a point of it with Nevers. Senator or no senator

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I won't have private investigators making the Beaumont their headquarters."

Chambrun held his finger on the disconnect button on his phone for a moment, then got the operator back. "Get me Senator Claude Farrand in his offices in the Senate Building in Washington. I'll hold on."

There was some delay in reaching the Senator. Chambrun, puffing on one of his Egyptian cigarettes, drummed his fingers on the desk. He suddenly broke in on a conversation between the Beaumont's switchboard operator and the Senator's secretary.

"Tell the Senator," he said, clipping off the words, "it's about an employee of his named Fisher. If the Senator doesn't choose to talk to me, tell him I shall release to the press the fact that Fisher was his employee. I say 'was' because Fisher is dead."

The Senator was instantly on the wire, booming, oily. "What's all this about Fisher, Mr. Chambrun?"

"He's dead, Senator. He may have committed suicide. He may have been put out of the way by someone. I need facts for the police and I need them in a hurry."

The Senator's breathing sounded as though he'd been running hard. "He wasn't an employee, Mr. Chambrun. Just a casual acquaintance. I gave him a letter to the hotel because he wanted a few days of fancy vacation."

"That won't do, Senator," Chambrun said coldly.

"Look here, Chambrun, can't you tell the police exactly what you know? The man registered at the hotel with a letter of introduction from me. I'll take the next scheduled flight from here to New York. Then they can question me and you won't be involved."

"As long as you're on the scene it's your baby, Senator," Chambrun said. "But don't miss that next flight."

He put down the receiver. His hooded eyes moved toward the blotting pad on his desk. Tucked under one of its leather corners was the receipt for $50,000 in cash signed that morning by Martin Hobbs.

Chambrun was aware that several days ago Senator Claude Farrand had made a speech on the Senate floor attacking the Secretary of Defense in connection with certain proposed contracts being negotiated with the Martin Hobbs Enterprises.

Miss Alison Barnwell—Mrs. John Wills in private life—had been handling the Beaumont's public relations for more than a year. She was extremely good at the job. She managed to look expensive without earning the salary to be expensive. She had a brisk pleasant manner, and a high, proud way of carrying her lovely red head.

Recently married, she was a very handsome woman who had blossomed into something really breathtaking. Every moment of her life was a joy to her now, even the minor exasperations of her job. The Beaumont was an important part of her life, not just a job, since her husband was being groomed by Pierre Chambrun for a top executive position. A close association with Chambrun had developed in Alison something of his possessive and protective feeling for the Beaumont.

It was this feeling that took Alison Barnwell to the Trapeze Bar about

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five o'clock that afternoon. She was in no hurry to get home from her work since Johnny, her husband, was at a hotel men's convention in Palm Springs.

There had been a note on Alison's desk that morning from Carl Nevers, the night reservation clerk. "Dear Miss Barnwell: Thought you might like to know that Laura Thomas of Hollywood registered early this morning."

Alison had giggled over the note. Mr. Nevers was as transparent as a windowpane. Ordinarily the list of newly registered celebrities was typed out by her secretary and placed on her desk. Alison's secretary was a walking social and celebrity register. Miss Thomas' name had been ignored by the secretary. Mr. Nevers, therefore, was feeling uneasy. He wanted to know if he'd been guilty of admitting an impostor.

Alison's secretary had brushed away the first inquiry. There was no such person as Laura Thomas—that is, no person by that name of even minor importance. Alison herself had never heard the name. But the signature on the registration card was intriguing. No street address. Just Hollywood—as though that was obviously enough for any postal clerk in the movie capital.

If the lady in question was a fake, the unadorned address was a bold touch, Alison thought. She wanted a look at Miss Thomas. Just before five o'clock Maggio, the day bell-captain, having been alerted, reported to Alison that Miss Laura Thomas was sipping a martini in the Trapeze Bar.

The Trapeze Bar at the Beaumont is suspended in space, like a birdcage, over the foyer to the Grand Ball Room. The foyer, painted a pale chartreuse with rich cherrywood paneling, is a meeting place for guests when the Ball Room itself is not in use. The Trapeze Bar, its walls made entirely of elaborate Florentine grillwork, is popular mainly because it is different. An artist of the Calder school had decorated it with mobiles of circus performers working on trapezes. They sway slightly in the draft from a concealed air-conditioning system. To be seen at the Trapeze meant that you were important, or that you don't know what you've got yourself into and will find out with a jolt when an obsequious waiter hands you the check.

Mike Maggio escorted Alison from the lobby to the Trapeze Bar and pointed out Laura Thomas sitting alone at a corner table, a chilled martini glass on the table in front of her.

Expensively smart, Alison thought as she crossed the room. There was nothing fake about the mink stole. The black sunglasses added the proper Hollywood touch. Unaware of scrutiny, Miss Thomas' mouth was a hard thin line, which went with the tensions of being famous. It could also go with the tensions of playing a phony role.

Alison stopped by the table. "Miss Thomas?" she said brightly.

The dark glasses turned sharply in Alison's direction. For a fraction of a moment Alison was certain they hid panic.

"Yes?" The girl's voice was cool and completely under control, however.

"I'm Alison Barnwell, Public Relations Director for the Beaumont. May I join you for a moment?"

Miss Thomas hesitated. Obviously

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she didn't want to be joined. "I'm just finishing my drink," she said, "and I have an engagement."

"Oh, please let me buy you another," Alison said. "I've been looking forward all day to talking with you."

The dark glasses turned toward the martini glass. Clearly another drink was a temptation. Alison sat down at the table without waiting to be asked and beckoned to the captain.

"Two very dry martinis, Mr. Del Greco," she said.

The elegant Mr. Del Greco bowed and retired to the bar with the order. Miss Thomas fished in her dark alligator handbag for a cigarette.

Alison held her small gold lighter for Miss Thomas. "Are you in the east to make personal appearances, Miss Thomas?" she asked.

"I'm really not interested in publicity, Miss Barnwell," the girl said. There was a false boredom in her voice. "This is the first vacation I've had in a long time and I'd like to stay out of the limelight."

"That's quite understandable," Alison said, wondering if she sounded as phony as Miss Thomas. She felt it. She laughed pleasantly. "One of the touchy parts of my job is to guess when a celebrity wants publicity and when she wants privacy. Her feelings can be hurt if you make a mistake either way."

"You can be quite certain I want no red-carpet treatment," Miss Thomas said.

"Then we'll just call this an official welcome to the Beaumont," Alison said, as Mr. Del Greco brought the martinis. "To the success of your latest picture." Alison raised her glass.

Miss Thomas' black glasses stared at Alison. "You saw it?" she asked.

"Well, frankly no," Alison said. "I don't get much opportunity to see films in my job, and I was married several months ago which takes up most of my spare time."

"Lucky you," Miss Thomas said drily. She sipped her drink.

There was an awkward pause which Alison knew she had to bridge. "Are you perhaps interested in doing something on Broadway, Miss Thomas?"

Miss Thomas seemed to be considering the question, but when she spoke she figuratively threw a right hook to Alison's jaw. "You really haven't the faintest idea who I am or what I've done, have you, Miss Barnwell?"

Alison blushed. "I'm afraid you've found me out, Miss Thomas. In my job we don't like to admit to ignorance, both out of vanity and an unwillingness to hurt the feelings of a guest."

"My feelings aren't hurt," Miss Thomas said. "All I really want, Miss Barnwell, is to be left alone." It was pointed and final.

Alison stood up, leaving her almost untouched drink. "I'm sorry to have intruded, Miss Thomas. But it *is* my job."

"Better luck next time," Miss Thomas said, giving Alison a small Cheshire-cat smile.

Alison walked out of the Trapeze, nodding to one or two people she knew. "That, my girl," she told herself, "was a first-class shellacking."

The fact was, if Miss Thomas was a phony she played her cards expertly and very, very close to the vest. She had made only one mistake. She had

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challenged Alison's curiosity so sharply that Alison was determined to find out all there was to know about Miss Thomas—who, what, and why.

The Clifford Cooks had a small domestic problem. Cook had bought theater tickets for himself and Anne. Comedy seemed the best medicine for his state of mind, and the ticket agent had highly recommended the latest musical comedy. Anne had got in touch with the front office to apply for a sitter to stay with Bobbie.

Bobbie was resentful. She wanted dinner in their suite by herself, served by room service. She wanted to watch her favorite TV programs without some nosey sitter to spoil her private fun. She would be entertaining certain imaginary friends who were very much a part of her daily life. Wouldn't there be a housekeeper on the floor? Wasn't the telephone right there?

"If you insist, Mum, I can call the operator every hour—but please, *please* let me have my private party."

Anne was anxious about Cliff. He seemed detached and worried since the morning meeting he'd described in some detail. It was all very well to refuse to submit to threats, but how real were the threats? Cliff seemed to be willing to give in to Bobbie's whim.

"If the sitter service checks with her periodically during the evening, why not?" he said. He had a feeling they wouldn't be staying in places with the rarefied atmosphere of the Beaumont very often in the future. Why not let the child have dinner served in solitary elegance by the room-service waiter, in the company of her imaginary friends? "Suppose we have the sitter call you every half hour, chicken? You answer and let her know how you are. If you don't, then the sitter will come up and stay with you."

"Oh, Daddy, you're a doll," Bobbie said.

So Cliff called the sitter service, engaged a sitter for the evening, but explained that Bobbie was to be allowed her solitary grandeur unless she failed to answer the phone. Promptly at eleven, the sitter would present herself, put Bobbie to bed, and stay on in the suite until the Cooks returned. Since they were having a night on the town they might as well hit one of the night clubs after the theater.

Bobbie was ecstatic. Anne was mildly concerned, but not quite certain whether it was for Bobbie or Cliff. And once the arrangements had been made, Cliff seemed to retreat into the private world of his business problems.

Mr. Paul Fisher's dead body was removed from Room 1208 about 5:20 in the afternoon and taken to the morgue. Lieutenant Hardy, a big athletic-looking young man who looked more like a good-natured, if slightly puzzled, college fullback than a Homicide detective, was not happy. Dr. Partridge, the house physician, and the Assistant Medical Examiner agreed that Mr. Fisher's heart had been sound until he'd swallowed a substantial dose of strychnine, which had knocked him off in the matter of seconds. Laboratory tests to confirm this still had to be made, but Hardy had no doubts of the confirmation.

There was no sign in Room 1208

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of any strychnine, or of anything that might have contained it.

The nearly empty liquor glass was the one which had contained the strychnine. It was covered with the late Mr. Fisher's fingerprints. The second glass, which had contained a drink without the special flavoring of strychnine, had no fingerprints on it at all. Wiped absolutely clean. There were no other fingerprints in the room, except Fisher's and the floor maid's.

Identification in Fisher's wallet was ample. It contained his driver's license, his license to operate as a private detective in the State of New York, some business cards, two credit cards, and half a dozen blank checks. The address on the credit cards and on the licenses was Fisher's office on lower Broadway. No home address. A phone call to his office was fruitless. No answer.

And apparently Mr. Fisher either kept his working notes in his head or else all notes and papers had been removed by his drinking companion of last evening.

Pierre Chambrun, whom Hardy knew from other occasions, suggested that Senator Farrand might have answers as to the case Fisher was working on. The Senator was on his way. Hardy checked on that. Jerry Dodd, the house security officer, had noticed nothing odd about Fisher's behavior —nothing to indicate who Fisher was interested in at the Beaumont.

Chambrun had kept his suspicions to himself. The Senator had a right to reveal his own business in his own fashion. But in *his* own way Chambrun was not waiting. His gut still ached.

Returning to his fourth floor office about six o'clock, Chambrun was pleasantly surprised to find Alison Barnwell waiting for him. Chambrun was fond of his Public Relations director. He had been indirectly involved in a crisis in her life and found out what a really fine human being she was. She pleased him in other ways. It was a theory of his that women had the responsibility to look attractive on all and any occasions. Alison never failed to meet this requirement.

"One of the things I like about you most, Alison," Chambrun said as he saw her, "is that you're psychic. I was just going to call you at home."

"I wish I thought it was for a date," Alison said. "The evenings are hell with Johnny away. I managed for a long time without him, but now I can't remember how I did it."

"If you haven't anything planned, dine with me here," Chambrun said. "The pot's boiling and I've got to stay here and sit on the lid. You might be useful."

"Miss Proctor just told me about the heart attack on twelve," Alison said. "I'd be glad to stay if I can be helpful."

"Sun's over the yardarm," Chambrun said. "Care for a drink? I know how you feel about my Turkish coffee."

"May I fix myself a Dubonnet on the rocks?"

Chambrun gestured toward the well-stocked sideboard and sat down at his desk. "It wasn't a heart attack on twelve," he said. "Probably a homicide."

"Mr. Chambrun!"

"And a very sticky one. This is strictly between us, Alison." And Chambrun gave her the details, plus

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the reasons for his concern about the Martin Hobbs Enterprises.

"You think there's a connection?"

He ticked off the points on his fingers. "Hobbs draws fifty thousand in cash which, in my suspicious mind, spells sudden getaway. Fisher, a private eye, was introduced into the hotel by Senator Farrand. The Senator has made loud noises in the Senate about government contracts going to Hobbs. The Senator is vastly disturbed over the news of Fisher's death and is on his way here by plane. You don't have to be a clairvoyant to see a relationship among those facts. Which brings me to my reason for having intended to call you, Alison. Hobbs has been here a week. He's never made a move without a blast of trumpets preceding him. I've noticed his PR man hanging around you with a kind of puppy love in his eyes."

Alison laughed. "Young Don Stanton has automatic mouth-watering reflexes at the sight of any pretty girl," she said. "But I'm running a bad second to Toni Blanton, our young singer in the Blue Lagoon Room. He takes her often to the zoo. What I'm missing!"

Chambrun's smile was faint, distracted. "Do you need your records to know how the Hobbs entourage spent last evening?"

"No," Alison said. "He entertained the officers of the Junior Chamber of Commerce at a private dinner. Later on they closed the Blue Lagoon."

"They were in the hotel then all evening?"

"The party was. I can't vouch for any one person, Mr. Chambrun. I wasn't there. Mr. Cardoza, the captain, might be able to help."

Chambrun glanced at his watch. "He's not on for twenty minutes."

"Incidentally, Hobbs has reserved a table in the Blue Lagoon for tonight for ten," Alison said. "Don Stanton wanted to make sure some of the important columnists would be present and cooperative."

Chambrun frowned at his cigarette end. "Either his getaway isn't planned for tonight, or this party plan is designed to keep someone's guard lowered. Be a doll, Alison, and check with Cardoza for me. The Hobbs party consists of Hobbs himself, George Webber, young Stanton, and a girl secretary."

"Miss Garth."

"See if Cardoza remembers any long absences from last night's wingding. The Medical Examiner guesses our friend Fisher swallowed his hemlock about midnight. I'd say eleven thirty to twelve thirty is the critical time. We'll dine at seven. Will you leave the ordering to me?"

"I'd be a fool not to," Alison said, starting for the door. "Cardoza often comes in early to go over any special banquet orders with Mr. Kraus."

Just as Alison reached the door Chambrun called to her. "My dear child, you came here to see me about something. I haven't given you a chance. What was it?"

Alison laughed ruefully. "Nothing important."

"If it wasn't important you wouldn't have been waiting for me. Let's have it."

"I just had my knuckles rather soundly rapped by one of the guests," Alison said. "A Miss Laura Thomas."

"The one with the live animal in her suitcase?" Chambrun asked.

"The *what?*"

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"Johnny Thacker swears she had a whining animal in one of her suitcases when he checked her into her room." Chambrun chuckled. "Mrs. Kniffen investigated for me." He picked up a slip of paper on his desk. "Five suitcases. Only one of them unpacked. The others locked. No sign of animal life. In what other way is she interesting, Alison?"

"Carl Nevers was worried about having let her register," Alison said. "He asked me, in his oblique fashion, to check on her. She may be Hollywood, but she's no Hollywood celebrity. Personally, I think she's a fake and a very clever one. The question I came to ask you is—do you care?"

Chambrun's narrowed eyes twinkled at her through cigarette smoke. His voice was paternal—but gently and affectionately reproving. "I've told you many times, my dear, that I cannot run this hotel efficiently without knowing everything that goes on in it. But *everything*. Yes, I care to know about Miss Thomas. But at the moment, a moment of crisis, I care more about Hobbs and his possible connection with the murder of Mr. Fisher."

The green light blinked on his desk. He picked up the phone and said, "Yes?" Then: "At once, Miss Proctor." He put down the phone. "Give Senator Farrand your most devastating smile on the way out," he said.

Senator Claude Farrand was a regular guest of the Hotel Beaumont on his visits to New York and had lived there for one long stretch during his service at the United Nations. He had come to know and respect Chambrun over a period of years. On one occasion he had been saved from a dangerously embarrassing moment by Chambrun's quick wit. A little too much old Kentucky bourbon at a dinner one night, plus the alluring and very bare-shouldered wife of a Texas oil man who was a power in the opposition party, had resulted in an indiscreet invitation to the lady to have a nightcap in the Senator's suite. The lady had been willing, and she had not been unreceptive to further suggestions. At a critical moment in the Senator's romantic campaign the door of the suite had been opened by a passkey and Chambrun, smiling blandly, had come in.

The Senator had breathlessly retired to do something about his disheveled condition and to put his black tie in order. The wind of his departure still stirred in the room when there was a sharp knock at the door.

Chambrun, cool and unruffled, opened the door to the press. The press, having been tipped off to a possible scandal, was thrown completely off base by the presence of the hotel manager.

"You wish to see the Senator?" Chambrun had asked.

They wished to see the Senator.

"He's been courteous enough to allow me to show his suite to Mrs. Cardwell. She and Mr. Cardwell are planning a lengthy stay with us and I wanted her to see what accommodations I could give them." He had turned suavely to the lady. "I trust these quarters will be satisfactory, Mrs. Cardwell?"

The lady, who had lost all zest for the chase, assured him that they would. Chambrun bowed her toward the door.

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"In that case shall we leave the Senator to his press conference?"

At which point the Senator, cued by Chambrun, appeared from the next room neat as a pin. "Well, boys," he said jovially, "what can I do for you?"

No, the Senator would never forget Pierre Chambrun. And now he needed him again.

Senator Farrand was a big man, expensively sloppy in his appearance. He had the deep, booming voice of an orator. But as he came into Chambrun's office he was sweating like an ordinary mortal.

"I came as quickly as I could," he said. "I take it from the way your man Dodd slipped me up here in a private elevator that the police are waiting for me."

"They are," Chambrun said. He wasn't the deferential hotel manager at this moment—he held trump cards in any game with the Senator, and he didn't choose to be maneuvered into the image of a fawning public servant.

The Senator sat down in the green leather chair by Chambrun's desk and wiped his florid face with a handkerchief. "How much do they know?"

"They know that Fisher was a friend of yours. That he registered here with a letter of introduction from you—which, by the way, was naughty of you, Senator. You know damn well I'd have chucked him out on his ear if I'd known he was a private detective. A slip-up in routine here is all that permitted him in. The police hope you may be able to tell them what case Fisher was working on."

"Oh, God," the Senator said. "Fisher had made no notes? There were no papers or documents to answer that question for them?"

"None."

The Senator cheered up noticeably. "Well, then," he said, "things aren't too bad. Fisher was a friend of mine—had done some work for me in the past. In the *past,* Chambrun. He wanted a vacation in a luxury spot and I wrote him a letter of introduction. I have no reason to think he was working at anything connected with me."

"The police may buy that but I don't, Senator," Chambrun said coldly. "For certain reasons I won't go into I can't help you in any such evasion."

"Now see here, Chambrun, I—"

"You see here, Senator. Not everyone in the world is a voting constituent of yours. A few days ago you gave a speech in the Senate condemning some defense contracts about to be awarded by the Federal Government to the Martin Hobbs Enterprises. Martin Hobbs is a guest here at the hotel. There are half a dozen smart Washington reporters who'll make the connection without half trying. I tell you this not to try to advise you on how to handle your problems, but because I will have to point all this out to the police—if you don't. I've waited for you to get here so that you could affirm or deny the connection. You'll have to do one or the other. You can't ignore it."

The Senator nodded slowly. He took a leather cigar case from an inside pocket. He busied himself for a moment, clipping off the end of the cigar and getting it burning.

"It's damned awkward, Chambrun," he said.

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"I'm sorry to hear it," Chambrun said. "It's damned awkward for me to have a murder in my hotel, particularly since Fisher should never have been registered here in the first place."

"I never dreamed—"

"I know, Senator. In my business I have to dream all the time—or be left in the starting gate."

"Politics," the Senator said. "Complex game, you know." He sounded as though he was about to deliver a lecture and Chambrun's hooded eyes became hostile. "You smell trouble. You get a whiff of conspiracy and you let go with both barrels, even if they're loaded with blanks. Usually everyone knows it's just politics. You call each other names in public, and then you have dinner together at night. Politics. Sometimes—rarely—you're asked to put up or shut up. This is what happened to me."

"Over the proposed Hobbs contracts?"

The Senator nodded. "Hobbs. Young whiz-bang. Big reputation. But something about that kind of spectacular success, about that kind of easy money—well, it always has a fishy smell to me. I thought it was safe enough for me to take a belt at him. Part of my job—keep jabbing at the administration. But my timing was off and my information incomplete. As it developed, the contracts with Hobbs haven't actually been signed. They will be if everything is according to Hoyle, but they haven't been signed yet. The result is, I'm in the position of having either to support my charges or be too obviously guilty of rank politicking. So I hired Fisher, a competent man, to see what he could find out for me. There could have been better ways to go about it."

"Through the proper committee investigators?"

"Except that I'm not a member of any committee that can properly deal with this contract business. So I hired me a private boy. My political hide will be scorched, Chambrun, if it is revealed that I've personally hired a detective to investigate the administration's business dealings—scorched or nailed to the barn door."

"Unless there is some fire where you thought you saw smoke," Chambrun said.

The Senator suddenly looked like an eager puppy dog. "There is some fire you know of?"

Chambrun hesitated. "This much, Senator. It's something to chew on. Perhaps you started something. A proper committee is investigating. I know that directly from Hobbs's bank in San Francisco. The reason I know is that Hobbs asked me to get him fifty thousand dollars in cash on a check drawn against his account there. I wanted to make sure the check wouldn't bounce."

The Senator whistled.

"You can add that up with Fisher's murder as well as I can," Chambrun said. "You know better than I do whether your position is a little better than you thought. So tell it your own way, Senator—but tell it. May I call Lieutenant Hardy, the detective in charge, and tell him you're here?"

The Senator stood up, blowing air like a whale. He felt a little better. "You may tell him, sir," he said. "You may also tell yourself, Chambrun, that for the second time I am deeply in your debt. Anything—anytime—you want something, ask for it."

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Chambrun's smile was thin, "Whatever I have done for you, Senator, has only been incidental to my job of protecting the Beaumont."

Miss Margaret Hillhouse, who made herself available to the Beaumont for baby-sitting services every night except on Sundays, was having an unusually pleasant evening. At 6:30 she had reported to 7H, the Cooks' suite, where she'd been introduced to Bobbie Cook. Bobbie was a charming little girl, squirming with excitement.

Anne Cook explained patiently what was expected of Miss Hillhouse. Bobbie was to have her private party; her supper to be brought by room service. Miss Hillhouse was to check with Bobbie by phone every half hour. Anne gave Miss Hillhouse an extra key.

"If she doesn't answer you are to come here at once and let yourself in, Miss Hillhouse, and the party will be over. Straight to bed."

"I'll answer, Mum!" Bobbie said.

"At eleven—no later, mind!—you'll come in and put Bobbie to bed," Anne went on. "You'll stay here until we get back. We thought of taking in a night club after the theater."

"I'll stay as late as you like, Mrs. Cook. Just enjoy yourselves," Margaret Hillhouse said.

So Miss Hillhouse also had her supper, paid for by the Cooks, served by room service in a small sitting room on the mezzanine. She could hear the dinner music from the Blue Lagoon Room. She was halfway through the newest best-seller and looked forward to a pleasant evening of reading.

At seven o'clock Alison Barnwell sat down at an exquisitely set table in Chambrun's office, a little popeyed by what was placed before her. There were cold canapés of stuffed eggs and creamed anchovies; there were hot hors d'oeuvres of crab meat Remick, sprinkled with chopped parsley; these followed by a deliciously flavored chicken consommé, accompanied by a delicate Rhine wine; then a few mouthfuls of pheasant under glass, with a 1953 Volnay; followed by a few bites of roast veal and artichoke bottoms swimming in a purée of chestnuts, with a 1952 Chambolle; followed by a plain green salad and thin slices of toast and Port Salud cheese and an ice-cold glass of champagne; and finally a fabulous rum cake, Turkish coffee, and a warming Kümmel as a liqueur. Pierre Chambrun did himself well.

Alison leaned back in her chair, feeling like an overstuffed Thanksgiving turkey. Chambrun, who apparently dined in this fashion every night, seemed to be delighted by her obvious pleasure. He sipped his coffee, smoked his cigarette, and looked at her like a man who remembers his lost youth with a profound nostalgia.

"I've been so impressed by this that I've forgotten to report back on Mr. Cardoza," Alison said.

Chambrun smiled like a sleepy cat. "I would have asked you," he said, "except that Cardoza leaves nothing to chance. He called me himself. No noticeable absences from the Hobbs party during last evening."

"There were comings and goings," Alison said. "And Miss Garth, the secretary, was not present at all."

"It's a 'could-be'," Chambrun said. "Any one of them could have visited

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and murdered Fisher—but there isn't the slightest proof that any one of them did. I've checked with the night staff. No one recalls anything significant. More Kümmel, Alison?"

In the Blue Lagoon, Martin Hobbs, George Webber, Don Stanton, and seven assorted guests were beginning a gay evening. On this occasion they were carefully watched by Mr. Cardoza, the captain. Hobbs and Webber each made trips to the Men's Room during the evening, but went nowhere else. Don Stanton left once, but only to circle around to the dressing room of Toni Blanton, the Blue Lagoon's attractive chanteuse. He returned directly to the table from there.

At the theater Cliff Cook laughed for the first time in days. The musical comedy lived up to the ticket agent's recommendation. Anne Cook called Miss Hillhouse during the first intermission and was reassured—Bobbie was having a ball and had dutifully answered the phone at every half hour. The Cooks decided to go to a night club after the theater.

Senator Claude Farrand was on his way back to Washington, having cleared his conscience with the police.

At a few minutes before eleven Miss Margaret Hillhouse made her way up from the mezzanine to 7H. Bobbie had been a little brisk at being interrupted at 10:30 at the beginning of a TV program. Now, standing outside the door of 7H, Miss Hillhouse could hear the closing theme as the TV show ended. Then she inserted the key Anne had given her into the door and went in.

Bobbie Cook was nowhere in the suite.

At ten minutes past eleven Chambrun and Jerry Dodd arrived at 7H where a frightened and tearful Miss Hillhouse awaited them. Miss Hillhouse, on discovering Bobbie's absence, had called Mrs. Carmichael, who managed the night-sitter service and who had promptly notified Mr. Chambrun.

Chambrun's "gut ache" was acute. Everything that had gone wrong on this day seemed to have a connection with Martin Hobbs. Clifford Cook was in the process of negotiating some kind of business deal with Hobbs and now Cook's eight-year-old daughter was missing.

Miss Hillhouse, fighting her tears, explained disjointedly how the evening had been arranged. She'd never encountered anything quite like it before, but it had seemed reasonable enough at the time. Everything had gone smoothly. The little girl had dutifully answered the phone every half hour, including the last one at 10:30.

Jerry Dodd was on the phone while Miss Hillhouse explained. The kid might be wandering around the hotel somewhere. The staff was alerted. He looked up at Miss Hillhouse while waiting for another connection.

"Eleven o'clock was bedtime," he said cheerfully. "She probably didn't want the evening to end. We'll find her down in the lobby or sneaking a look at the goings-on in the Blue Lagoon. A kid like that can make a Federal case out of going to bed."

Then Johnny Thacker came on the phone and Dodd gave orders for a careful search.

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"When do you expect the Cooks back?" Chambrun asked. He didn't feel as cheerfully optimistic as Jerry Dodd. As a matter of fact, he was deeply distrubed. He couldn't somehow swallow all the coincidences of the day.

"They went to the theater," Miss Hillhouse said.

"What theater?"

"I heard them mention a musical comedy, but I can't remember the name of the show."

Chambrun glanced at his wrist watch. 11:20. The show would be over. "Coming straight home?"

"No, sir. They were going to a night club."

"Which one?"

"They didn't say, sir. Mrs. Cook may phone in. She did call during the first theater intermission."

"She may not," Chambrun said. "She'll assume the child's now safe in bed and asleep. Another call would disturb her."

Jerry Dodd came over from the phone. "If she left this floor she'd probably go by elevator, wouldn't she? Anyone would notice an eight-year-old girl all by herself. They'll pick her up in a few minutes."

Miss Hillhouse began to weep. "Oh, I hope so!"

"Get hold of yourself," Chambrun said sharply. "You have nothing to blame yourself for. You followed your instructions to the letter."

He went over to the phone and asked to be connected with the Blue Lagoon. Mr. Cardoza, the captain, answered in his low suave voice. "Chambrun here, Cardoza. About the Hobbs party. Still there?"

"Yes, Mr. Chambrun. Still going strong."

"Comings and goings?"

"None, sir. Oh, the Men's Room, the powder room. But no one in the party has gone out into the hotel proper."

"You're positive?"

Cardoza sounded injured. "You told me to watch, Mr. Chambrun."

"Sorry to be edgy," Chambrun said. "If the party breaks up, or if anyone does leave it, call me in my office or in 7H."

"Depend on me, Mr. Chambrun."

"I do."

Chambrun put down the phone. "Jerry, I want someone stationed outside the entrance to the Blue Lagoon. If anyone in Hobbs's party leaves I want to know where they go and what they do."

Jerry nodded, but looked puzzled. "But what has that got to do with the price of eggs?"

"I wish I knew," Chambrun said. Frowning, he picked up the phone again. "Get me Miss Barnwell at her apartment," he said.

"Johnny?" Alison's drowsy voice said.

"Sorry to disappoint you. Chambrun here."

The sharpness of his voice evidently brought Alison wide-awake. "I'd just dozed off, Mr. Chambrun. I thought it was Johnny calling from Palm Springs."

"We've got new troubles here, Alison. An eight-year-old girl has disappeared. No time to give you the details, but we'd like to locate her parents. They went to see a musical comedy, then planned to go to a night club. If you were an out-of-towner where would you go?"

"El Morocco, Stork Club, Latin Quarter," Alison said promptly.

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"Thanks."

"Can I do anything?"

"I'd like it if you were here. If this gets out, the press will be hammering at us—at our sitter system, at our inefficiency."

"Did someone slip up?"

"I don't think so. It may be a false alarm. Jerry thinks the kid just didn't want to go to bed and took off on her own. I hope he's right. I have an uncomfortable feeling he's wrong."

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes," Alison said.

Chambrun held down the phone button for a moment and was then reconnected with the switchboard. "Jane? I want you to call three night clubs—El Morocco, Stork Club, and Latin Quarter. I want Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Cook paged in all three places. I'll be here unless I tell you otherwise."

Miss Hillhouse seemed to have got control of herself when Chambrun crossed over from the phone.

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Cook have friends in the hotel?" she asked Chambrun.

"Acquaintances," Chambrun said.

"Perhaps one of them got in touch with Bobbie and she went with them," Miss Hillhouse suggested.

"I've been checking on that," Chambrun said, not explaining how. But perhaps he hadn't done as much in that direction as he should, he thought.

He went back to the phone and talked to the operator again. Had there been any calls to Suite 7H during the evening other than the ones from Miss Hillhouse on the mezzanine? At night there were two operators to handle incoming calls and two to handle outgoing calls. The "out" operators would have handled room-to-room calls in the hotel.

It was asking a lot of them to remember, yet they might. No one was ever put directly through to a room. A name was asked for, the room was called, the guest was asked if he wished to receive the call. Maybe they'd remember talking to a little girl.

But they didn't.

The repeated calls from Miss Hillhouse were all they remembered. The "in" operators could not remember any calls to 7H except one from Anne Cook about ten o'clock.

Jerry Dodd, still hoping the child had wandered off on her own, went out to check in person. But with each passing minute, Jerry's optimism decreased.

At twenty-five minutes to midnight Alison appeared. Chambrun brought her quickly up-to-date on the evening's events, the arrangements made by the Cooks with Miss Hillhouse, the now almost vanished hope that Bobbie was "making a Federal case" out of going to bed. There was a twist of pity at the corners of Alison's mouth as she listened. She could imagine Anne Cook, pushed into this rather unusual arrangement by the child, never forgiving herself if anything serious had happened to Bobbie.

At a quarter to twelve the phone rang and Chambrun, who answered, heard Anne Cook's frightened voice on the other end. She'd been located at the Latin Quarter. He explained who he was and what had happened.

"Try not to be too alarmed, Mrs. Cook," he said. "It's quite possible she skipped out so she wouldn't have to go to bed. My entire staff is look-

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ing for her and we may have her safely back in your rooms by the time you and Mr. Cook get here."

"Oh, my God," was all that Anne Cook said.

After-theater traffic in New York was heavy, and it wasn't until ten minutes past twelve that Anne and Cliff Cook arrived in 7H. By then even Jerry Dodd's hopes were almost non-existent. Not a single elevator-man, bellboy, or doorman had seen Bobbie Cook. There were, of course, unpatrolled fire stairs. It was not impossible for the child to have gone—or been taken—from floor to floor without being seen. You could actually leave the hotel by way of the fire stairs. The fire-stairway doors at street level could be easily opened from the inside, though no one could come in from the street.

Bobbie, accompanied by her imaginary friends, could have got out onto the street without being seen. It seemed to Jerry it would be a wise thing to alert the police, who could start looking for her in the neighborhood. He made this suggestion to Cliff Cook and Chambrun. Anne, accompanied by Alison, was hearing the story over again from Miss Hillhouse.

Cook seemed dazed, but he was instantly adamant on this point. "Not the police. Not yet," he said.

Jerry raised a questioning eyebrow at Chambrun.

The final knot was tied in Chambrun's gut. Almost any father in Cook's place would have jumped at help from the police, insisted on it—unless he had reason to suspect a kidnaping, a word that so far hadn't even been mentioned by anyone in 7H.

"Once, when I was a small boy," Chambrun said in a detached voice, "I turned up missing in a hotel my father was managing at the time." It was a complete invention. "I was missing for hours. They finally found me asleep in a broom closet. I take it that eleven o'clock was well past Bobbie's normal bedtime, Mr. Cook?"

Cliff Cook hadn't heard a word he said. But Anne Cook had—she was hearing everything.

"Once in a while she was allowed to stay up to see a special TV show, Mr. Chambrun. Normally she goes to bed about nine. You think she may—?"

"There are a thousand places a child might get into in this hotel, Mrs. Cook—places interesting to a child. I mentioned broom closets. There are hundreds of them. There are special banquet rooms and conference rooms. There are offices. Bobbie could have got into any one of these places, sat down to look at something, and just popped off to sleep." He turned to Dodd. "Jerry, we'll just have to begin systematically and go from bottom to top. Start the wheels."

"Right," Dodd said, and hurried out.

Chambrun turned to Alison. "I'd appreciate it if you'd go down to the telephone office, Alison, and explain the situation to Mrs. Kiley, the chief night-operator. I want her to call every occupied room in the hotel. The child may have wandered in somewhere and told some imaginative story. People told that her parents were at a night club may have been amused by her and kept her with them, talking. There'll be squawks—but start the phoning, Alison."

Alison went off without a word.

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"Miss Hillhouse," Chambrun said, "I don't think there's anything more you can do here. I suggest you go home and get some rest. Take a sleeping pill if you've got one. As soon as Bobbie turns up we'll let you know. I'll call you myself."

"No!" Cliff Cook said in a harsh voice. He turned on Chambrun and his face was gray as a death mask. "You're not going to find her in any broom closet or banquet room."

"Cliff!" Anne said in a frightened voice.

There was murder in Cook's sunken eyes. "You had a key to this suite, Miss Hillhouse," he said. "What happened? Did you call a confederate or your employer and turn the key over to him?"

The girl stared at him, swaying like an axed tree.

"How much were you paid?" Cook shouted at her. "Did you ever really call her during the evening? We only have your word for it."

"Just a minute," Chambrun said sharply. "She called Bobbie every half hour, and Bobbie answered the phone. My telephone staff can vouch for that. Until ten thirty Bobbie was in this room."

Cook waved a long arm. "So she wasn't taken till after ten thirty. You did that to cover yourself, didn't you, Miss Hillhouse? So help me God, if Bobbie is harmed I will personally—"

Miss Hillhouse screamed.

"I want you to go, Miss Hillhouse!" Chambrun said. Cook was a head taller than Chambrun but something in Chambrun's suddenly hard eyes kept him from interfering. Miss Hillhouse literally ran out of the room.

"Now, Mr. Cook, let's make some sense. Forget about Miss Hillhouse. She followed what I must say were rather unusual instructions from you. You're wasting energy and time considering her a part of any kidnaping plot. Because you think it is a kidnaping, don't you?"

Cook, his legs suddenly buckling under him, sank down in an upholstered armchair, his body slumped forward. Anne was instantly on her knees beside him, holding his face in her hands, whispering his name. "Don't blame yourself, darling," Chambrun heard her say. "How could you dream—?" Her words were suddenly cut off by a deep, choking sob from the man.

"I'll call them, Anne. I'll have her back in no time. You'll see," Cook said. He raised his head as though it weighed a ton. "Thank you for everything, Mr. Chambrun, but we'd appreciate being left alone."

Chambrun didn't move. His eyes were almost hidden by his heavy, hooded lids. He was tapping an Egyptian cigarette on the back of his hand.

"You suspect that Hobbs Enterprises are behind this, Mr. Cook?" he asked quietly.

Cook stared at him, his mouth sagging open.

"It occurred to me somewhat earlier," Chambrun said, as if he were discussing the weather. "Is there something in your business relationship with Hobbs that would make him want to put great pressure on you?"

Cook rose very slowly from his chair, his arm around his wife as if he needed her support. "What do you know about this, Mr. Chambrun?"

"I can only tell you that a series of events today led me to wonder if

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Hobbs might desperately want you to do something you had refused to do. I use the word 'desperate' because kidnaping is a desperate business, Mr. Cook."

Cook shook his head, trying to clear it. "I've refused to sell them certain patents they need," he said. "If that's the price for Bobbie, then of course I'll sell them." He turned to his wife. "I promise you I will, darling."

"I'd like to tell you two things, Mr. Cook," Chambrun said. "For reasons not connected with Bobbie I've had Hobbs under surveillance all evening—he and Webber and young Stanton. I know where they are now and I know exactly where they've been since eight o'clock. None of those three has had anything personally to do with removing Bobbie from this suite. That, of course, doesn't mean that they're not responsible for hiring someone to do the job. But it's almost as though they'd deliberately set up an alibi for themselves for the entire evening."

"So tell me where they are and I'll go and make the deal with them right now," Cook said.

"They're giving a party in the Blue Lagoon. But before you go to them, Mr. Cook, please keep listening. You're never going to pin this thing on Hobbs or on any of his associates. Maybe Bobbie will reappear after you sign away your patents and maybe she won't. But if what happened to her will in any way point to Hobbs, I tell you she *won't* reappear."

"Oh, my God!" Anne said.

"Our best chance, Mrs. Cook, is to find her, and find her quickly," Chambrun went on. "If they haven't got her out of the hotel we have a good chance of finding her alive."

"You don't believe that," Anne said.

Chambrun glanced at his watch. "She's been gone just under two hours. But we started looking for her only an hour and twenty minutes ago. Unless they got her out of the hotel in the first half hour she's still here somewhere. What I'm getting at, my friends, is that you can't go to Hobbs and say, 'Return Bobbie and I'll sell you my patents.' If you say it publicly, he'll sue you for defamation; if you say it to him privately, he'll treat you as if you were out of your mind, comfort you, offer to help."

"I can't risk *not* going to him," Cook said. "Suppose I go now to the Blue Lagoon. I won't mention what's happened. I'll tell him I'm ready to sign and want to do it tonight so that I can—can start home early in the morning."

"Then what?" Chambrun asked.

"They'll send her back!" Cook cried.

"If they can afford to," Chambrun said. "When were you scheduled to see Hobbs again?"

"Tomorrow morning. He asked me to think about it overnight—damn him, I told him another day wouldn't change things. All the time they had this frightful thing up their sleeves to use against me."

"Give me time," Chambrun said.

"I can't," Cook said. "The only thing that matters now is getting Bobbie back, don't you understand? So I'll do what they want me to do."

Chambrun glanced at his watch. "The Blue Lagoon closes at three, Mr. Cook—a little more than two hours from now. Unless I miss my

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guess, Hobbs's party will ride it out there till closing time. Give me until three. We'll have covered every inch of space in the hotel by then. As soon as our search is complete I won't ask you to hold back. There's still an outside chance she wandered off and fell asleep somewhere."

"No!" Cook said. "I knew what had happened the minute you called us at the Latin Quarter."

"I find it hard to understand how," Chambrun said, his voice hard, "if you suspected trouble from Hobbs you went off and left your daughter here under these odd circumstances."

"I anticipated trouble from Hobbs," Cook said, his body twisting with pain, "but *not* this kind of trouble. A business war, yes—that's what I expected and I was ready to try to fight him. It never occurred to me for a moment they'd attack this way. A war on my credit, yes! A war on my sources of supply, yes. But a war on my child? It never even crossed my mind."

"I'm willing to give Mr. Chambrun his chance, Cliff," Anne said in a low voice.

"They still don't know which way you're going to jump, so they don't know which way they should jump," Chambrun said. "They probably don't know that you're back from your evening on the town. They don't know that you realize anything has happened. They think the baby sitter has reported the child missing and that we're looking for her. But they have no reason to think we suspect a kidnaping. Let them stew a little while we hunt."

"I don't know," Cook said, shaking his head from side to side.

"I can guess what will happen tomorrow," Chambrun said. "Just before you go to your meeting with Hobbs you'll get a ransom note. It will demand a sum in cash you can't possibly raise. You'll be expected to sign away your patents in return for a cash advance—" A sour smile moved Chambrun's lips. "Say, fifty thousand dollars."

"I'll go along with you for a while—if Anne agrees," Cook said.

"Of course I agree, darling," Anne said.

Pierre Chambrun walked determinedly to the telephone. His dark eyes were flashing. In less than one minute the full force of the Beaumont's organization, under Chambrun's steel grip and velvet-gloved direction, would be unleashed . . .

(Continued on page 121)

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The fourth in the new series of counterespionage stories—a tale that unfolds slowly, not revealing its inner workings, its innermost secret, until . . .

FEAR AND TREMBLING'S

by MICHAEL GILBERT

"YOU CAN BOOK STRAIGHT THROUGH to Heidelberg," said Mr. Leonard Caversham, "but it's a long and tiring journey, and I'd suggest that you break it at Cologne. You can go on next morning."

"I've never been to Germany before," said the man. "Matter of fact, I dropped quite a few bombs on it during the war."

"It might perhaps be wiser not to mention that when you get there," said Mr. Caversham, with a smile.

"Could you book me a room in a hotel at Cologne?"

"Certainly. It will take a couple of days to arrange. If you come back at the end of the week, I should have the tickets and reservations all ready for you."

"And if I am going to stop the night at Cologne, I suppose I ought to notify the hotel in Heidelberg that I shall be a day late."

"We could do that for you, too," said Mr. Caversham.

Before he had come to work at Trembling's Tours, Mr. Caversham sometimes wondered why anyone should employ someone else to do a simple job like booking a ticket or making a reservation. Now he was beginning to understand that such a simple assignment could be stretched to include quite a number of other services. He had spent the previous afternoon telephoning four different hotels in Amsterdam in one of which a lady was certain she had left her jewel case. (It was found later in the bottom of her husband's suitcase.)

As the ex-bomber pilot departed, Roger Roche came through from the back office. He looked dusty, disorganized, and depressed. In the last two respects, as Mr. Caversham knew, appearances were deceptive. Roger had shown himself, in the short time he had been with Trembling's Tours, a competent and irrepressibly cheerful courier.

"What a crowd," he said, running his stubby fingers through his mop of light hair. "What a bleeding marvelous collection."

"Were they worse than the last lot, Roger?"

"Compared with this crowd, the

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last lot were a school treat. We had a dipsomaniac, a kleptomaniac, five ordinary maniacs, and two old women who never stopped quarreling. What bothered 'em most was who sat next to the window. 'On my right,' I said, 'you will hobserve the magnificent Tyrolean panner-rammer of the Salzkammergut.' 'I *told* you it was going to be extra-special today, Gertrude. I can't think why I let you have the window. We'll change at lunchtime.' 'You had it all yesterday.' '*Yesterday* was just forests.' "

Mr. Caversham laughed. He noticed that when Roger was reporting his own remarks he lapsed into exaggerated cockney, while the observations of his passengers were reproduced in accurate suburbanese.

"You get well tipped for your pains," he said. "The last lot were mad about you."

"Ah! There was a girl on the last lot—and when I say a girl, I mean—a girl. Nothing in this bunch under ninety."

The bell sounded behind the counter.

"I'm wanted," said Mr. Caversham. "You'll have to hold the fort."

"I was going to have lunch."

"It'll only be five minutes."

Mr. Caversham went through the door behind the counter and along the passage. He was of average height, thick, and he moved with deliberation.

The room at the end of the passage was still known as the Founder's Room, having belonged to Mr. Walcott Trembling, who had organized and accompanied tours at a time when a visit to the Continent was an adventure, when a tourist expected to be swindled from the moment he arrived at Calais, and a careful family carried its drinking water with it.

Arthur Trembling, his great-grandson, rarely found time to visit the Continent himself, being, as he told his friends, "snowed under" with the work of the agency, the largest in Southampton, and still one of the best-known in the country.

Mr. Caversham looked at him inquiringly.

Mr. Trembling said, "I believe you've got a car here, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Caversham. He drove into Southampton every day, from the furnished cottage he had rented on the fringes of the New Forest.

"I wouldn't bother you, but my car's tied up at the garage. I wondered if you could run a parcel round to my brother Henry's shop."

"No trouble at all," said Mr. Caversham. "The only thing is that it'll leave the front office empty. Mr. Snow is away this week, and Mr. Belton's having lunch."

"Who's there now?"

"I left Roger holding the fort."

"He can go on holding it. It

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won't take you more than ten minutes."

"Right," said Mr. Caversham. "Where's the parcel?"

Mr. Trembling had the grace to look embarrassed.

"I'm afraid I assumed you'd say yes. The parcel's in the boot of your car already. It's quite a big one."

"That's all right," said Mr. Caversham. He was placid and obliging—qualities which, in the few weeks he had been there, had already endeared him to his employer.

His ancient Standard was in the corner of the yard, outside the garage (in which, then they were not speeding down the motorways of Europe, the Trembling forty-seater touring coaches were housed). Mr. Caversham glanced into the trunk compartment of his car. In it was a large square parcel, wrapped in brown paper and well corded. It would, he guessed, be books. Henry Trembling, Arthur's brother, was a second-hand bookseller.

Mr. Caversham drove slowly and carefully. He was not sorry to be out of the office. His course took him along the quays, outside the ramparts of the old town, and into the modern area of shops clustered round the railway station. Henry, a stouter, whiter, more paunchy version of his brother, helped him take out the parcel. It was surprisingly heavy—but books always weigh a lot. Henry pressed a pound note into Mr. Caversham's hand.

"For your trouble and your petrol," he said. It seemed generous payment for a quarter mile run, but Mr. Caversham said nothing. As he drove back to the office he whistled softly between his teeth.

Strangely enough, he was thinking of Lucilla.

Lucilla was something of a mystery in the office. She was Arthur Trembling's secretary. She had been there longer than any other member of the staff—which was not saying a great deal, for Trembling's paid their employees badly, and parted with them rapidly. But it made Lucilla all the more inexplicable, for she was not only competent, she was positively beautiful.

The only theory which made sense to the other employees of Trembling's was that she was Arthur's mistress. "Though what she can see in him," as Roger said to Mr. Caversham, "beats me. I should have said he had as much sex in him as a flat soda-water bottle." Mr. Caversham had agreed. He agreed with almost everybody.

When he got back, he found Lucilla in the front office, dealing with a lady who wished to take four children and a Labrador to Ireland. He thought she looked worried and, for a girl of her remarkable poise, a little off-balance.

When she had dealt with the customer, she came across to him.

"I suppose Roger wouldn't wait any longer for his lunch," said Mr. Caversham.

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"The poor boy, yes. He was hungry. Where have you been?"

"Running errands for the boss," said Mr. Caversham. He was an observant man, and now that Lucilla was close to him he could read the signs quite clearly—the tightening round the mouth, the strained look in her eyes; he could even see the tiny beads of perspiration on her attractive, outward-curving upper lip.

"What's up?" he said.

"I can't talk now" she said. "I've got to go back—to him. Can you get out for half an hour at tea-time?"

"Should be all right," said Mr. Caversham. "Four o'clock. Belton can carry things for half an hour. We'll go to the Orange Room."

Lucilla nodded, and disappeared. Mr. Caversham reflected that it was girls who were cool and collected most of the time who really went to pieces when trouble came. And trouble was coming. Of that he had been certain since the previous day, when he had heard Lucilla screaming at Arthur Trembling in his office.

The Orange Room was one of those tea shops which shut out the sunlight with heavy curtains, and only partially dispel the gloom with economy-size electric bulbs. A table in the far corner was as safe a place for the confessional as could have been devised.

Lucilla said, "He's a beast—a vile beast. And speaking for myself, I've stood it long enough. For over a year he's been stringing me along, promising to marry me. First he was ill. Then his mother was ill. His mother! I ask you. What's she got to do with whether he gets married or not?"

Mr. Caversham grunted sympathetically. It was all he felt that was expected of him.

"If he thinks he's going to get off scot-free, he can think again," said Lucilla. "He's up to something, something criminal, and I'm going to put the police onto him."

Mr. Caversham leaned forward, with heightened interest, and said, "Now what makes you think that?"

"It's something to do with the tours. Every time a tour comes back, there's a big parcel in his office. It's something he pays the tour drivers to bring back for him."

"All of them?"

"I don't expect all of them. Maybe there're some he can't bribe. But Roger's one of them. There's a secert compartment in each of the coaches."

"Did Roger tell you that?"

"No. Basil told me."

Mr. Caversham remembered Basil—a black-haired boy, with buck-teeth, who had been very fond of Lucilla.

"What is it? Watches? Drugs? Perfume?"

"Basil doesn't know. It was just a big, heavy parcel. But I'm going to find out this evening. He's leaving

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early—there's a Rotarian meeting."

"The parcel isn't in his office now. I took it down to his brother's bookshop."

"Yes, but he took something out of it first. I came in when he was packing it up again. And if it's something valuable, it'll be in his private safe."

"To which," said Mr. Caversham, with a ghost of a smile, "you have, no doubt, a duplicate key."

"No, I haven't. But I know where he keeps his key. It's in a stupid little so-called secret drawer in the desk. I found out about it months ago."

"Few things remain hidden from an observant woman," said Mr. Caversham. "Are you asking me to help you?"

"That's just what I am asking."

"I agree. Two heads are better than one. What I suggest is this. I'll go down this evening and keep an eye on the bookshop. You have a look in the safe. I shouldn't take anything—just look. We'll meet later and add up what we've got. If it's enough to put old Trembling away, we'll let the police have it."

"Could we talk out at your place?"

"It's a bit off the beaten track."

"All the better. I've got a car."

"Eight o'clock, then," said Mr. Caversham. "Nip back now. We don't want to be seen together."

He gave her two minutes' start, paid the bill, and walked back thoughtfully. Possibly he was wondering how Lucilla knew where he lived. He could not recollect that he had ever told her.

At twenty past five Arthur Trembling walked through the front office, scattering a general "Good night" as he went. Mr. Caversham thought that he, too, looked preoccupied. Evidently his Rotarian speech was weighing on his mind.

Mr. Caversham helped Mr. Belton to close down the front office, got out his car, and drove it toward the Station, parking it in the yard. The last bit, he thought, would be better done on foot. He had noticed a sidewalk café nearly opposite the bookshop. He took a seat in the bow window, ordered plaice and chips, opened an evening paper, and settled down to watch.

In the first half hour one old lady and one schoolboy entered the bookshop. Neither stayed more than three minutes. Shortly after six Henry Trembling emerged, put the shutters up, padlocked an iron arm into place across the door, and departed.

"And that," said Mr. Caversham, "would appear to be that." Nevertheless, he remained where he was. His interest had shifted to the office building next to the bookshop. This was a building with an entrance opening on the street, inside which he could see a board, with names on it, and a staircase which no doubt served the several offices in the building.

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Mr. Caversham noted a number of men and women coming out. He also noted quite a few middle-aged and elderly men going in—a fact which seemed a little odd at that time of night. But what was odder still—none of them seemed to reappear.

Mr. Caversham scribbled a rough tally on the edge of his paper. "White hair, horn-rims, 6:18." "Fat, red carnation, 6:35." "Tall, thin, checked ulster, 6:50." By half-past seven he had a list of eleven people, and had exhausted the patience of his waitress. He paid his bill, and left. As he came out of the café, a twelfth man was disappearing into the office building.

Farther down the street, on the other side, a red-faced man was sitting at the wheel of an old gray Buick. There was nothing odd about him except that Mr. Caversham, who missed little, had noticed him there when he went into the café, nearly two hours earlier.

He walked back to his car, and drove home.

The furnished cottage he had rented lay at the end of a short straight lane, rutted and dusty in summer, barely passable in winter. Some people might have found it lonely, but Mr. Caversham was fond of solitude. Now, in late spring, the trees were in full leaf, and the approach to the cottage was a tunnel of shadow.

He touched on his headlights as he swung in off the main road, and braked just in time. The smart two-seater Fiat was parked in the middle of the drive, and not more than two yards in.

"Women!" said Mr. Caversham. He got out and approached the car cautiously. Lucilla was in the passenger seat. She did not turn her head as he came up. Mr. Caversham opened the door on the driver's side. The opening of the door operated the interior light, which came on, and showed him Lucilla more clearly.

She was dead, and had been dead, he guessed, for some time. Her face was already livid. She had been strangled, and the cord which had strangled her was still round her neck, cut so deep into the flesh that only the ends could be seen, dangling at the front, like a parody of a necktie.

Mr. Caversham got out of the car and closed the door softly. He stood in the drive, balanced squarely on his legs, his thick body bent forward, his arms hanging loosely. His head turned slowly, left and right. He looked like a Western gunfighter, at the moment of the draw.

Abruptly he swung round, returned to his own car, jumped in, backed it out into the road, and drove it a couple of hundred yards before turning through an open field gate and running in under the trees. He had switched off all the lights before he started. Now he locked the car, and ambled back,

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at a gentle trot, by the way he had come. At the corner of the lane he stopped again, to look and listen. Dusk was giving way to dark. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the evening.

Mr. Caversham allowed a slow minute to elapse. Then he walked up to the car, opened the door, and climbed in without a second glance at the dead girl. The ignition key, as he had noted, was still in the lock. The engine, which was still warm, started at first touch. He backed the car out into the road. From the direction of Southampton a car was coming, fast. He could see the headlights as it roared over the humpback bridge beside Shotton.

Mr. Caversham grinned to himself unpleasantly, swung the little car away from Southampton, and drove off.

Half a mile down the road he turned into a drive and got out. It took him five minutes to shift the body into the back seat and then cover it with a rug. After that he switched on his sidelights and took to the road again. He drove quickly and surely, handling the strange car as though he had been driving it for months. A fast circuit of Southampton's sprawling suburbs brought him into the town again from the west. A few minutes later he was examining the road signs in a large development, which seemed to have been laid out by a naval architect.

Beyond Hawke Road and Frobisher Drive he found Howe Crescent. Number 17 was a pleasant, detached house, with a neat garden and a separate entrance to a fair-sized garage. Mr. Caversham drove straight in. The owners were, as he well knew, in Venice. He had himself sold them their tickets a fortnight before, and had helped them make arrangements for the boarding out of their cat.

A bus ride and a few minutes' walk brought Mr. Caversham back to the place where he had left his own car. He climbed in and drove it sedately toward Southampton. As he entered the car park of the cinema he looked at his watch. It was just over three-quarters of an hour since he had found Lucilla. He seemed to have covered a lot of ground.

It was a cowboy film, and Mr. Caversham settled back to enjoy it.

The film finished at eleven o'clock and ten minutes later he was turning into the lane which led to his cottage. A police car was parked in front of his gate.

"Can I help you?" said Mr. Caversham. "Perhaps you have lost your way."

"Is your name Caversham? We'd like a word with you."

"Come in," said Mr. Caversham. He opened the front door, which was not locked, turned on the lights, and led the way in. The last time he had seen the red-faced man he had been seated behind the

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wheel of an old gray Buick, on the opposite side of the road to Henry Trembling's bookshop.

The man said, "I'm Detective-Sergeant Lowther of the Southampton Police. This is Detective-Sergaent Pratt."

"Good evening," said Mr. Caversham. He managed to add a question mark at the end of it.

"We've come out here because we had a message that a girl's body had been found in a car."

"And had it?"

Sergeant Lowther looked at Mr. Caversham. It was not exactly a look of hostility, nor was it friendly. It was the sort of look that a boxer might give an opponent as he stepped into the ring.

He said, "Neither the body nor the car was here when we arrived."

"And had it been here?"

"According to a boy who came past the end of the road at half-past seven, there was a car here. A Fiat. He happened to notice the number, too."

"Boys often do notice these things. I expect you'll be able to trace it."

"We have traced it. It belongs to a Miss Lucilla Davies." The Sergeant paused. Mr. Caversham said nothing. "We contacted her lodging. She hasn't been home."

"The night," said Mr. Caversham, "is still young."

"Look—" said the Sergeant, "I said—Lucilla Davies. Do you mean to say you don't know her?"

"Of course I know her. She works in the same place that I do. On a rather superior level. She is Mr. Trembling's secretary."

"Then why didn't you say so before?"

"Why should I?"

"Look," said the Sergeant, "do you mind telling us where you've been?"

"I've been to the cinema. The Rialto. The film was called 'Two-finger Knave.' And just in case you think I'm not being entirely truthful, I should mention that the film broke down after the third reel, and we had to wait five minutes while it was being mended. The manager came on the stage and apologized."

"Look—" said the Sergeant.

"And now, would you very much mind going away, and letting me get to bed. If you will, I'll consider forgiving you for entering my house, without a warrant, in my absence."

"Entering—?"

"Well," said Mr. Caversham. "I'm quite certain I didn't make that muddy mark on the linoleum there. You can see it quite clearly. It looks to me like a boot, not a shoe."

"Look—" said the Sergeant.

"However, you did at least have the delicacy not to search my bedroom."

Sergeant Lowther's face got a shade redder than before. "Assuming," he said, "for the sake of argu-

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ment, but not admitting it—assuming that we had a look in here, just to see if you were at home, how would you know that we didn't go upstairs as well?"

"I don't think you could have." Mr. Caversham whistled softly, and the great dog rose from the pool of shadow at the top of the stairs and came padding down, his tail acock, his amber eyes gleaming.

"Well, I'm damned," said Sergeant Lowther. "Has he been lying there all the time?"

"All the time," said Mr. Caversham. "And when you're gone, I expect he'll tell me all about you. I understand a lot of what he says—and he understands everything that I say."

The dog's mouth half opened, in a derisory smile, revealing white teeth.

"He's our man, all right," said Sergeant Lowther to Inspector Hamish next morning. "I didn't like his attitude—not one little bit."

"That dog of his," said Sergeant Pratt. "Fair gives me the creeps to think he was lying there all the time, watching us, and never made a sound."

Inspector Hamish was tall, bald, and cynical, with the tired, empty cynicism of a life devoted to police duties.

"Have you checked at the cinema?"

"Yes, and there was a break in the film—just like he said."

"Then what makes you think he didn't go to the cinema?"

"He was too damned cool. Too ready with all the answers."

"You ask me," said Sergeant Pratt, "I wouldn't be surprised if you found he'd got a record."

"Do you think he's mixed up with Trembling's little game?"

"Could easily be. He was hanging round watching the bookshop last night, like I told you."

The telephone rang. Inspector Hamish answered it. His expression changed not at all. At the end he said, "All right, thank you." And to Sergeant Lowther, "We're going out to 17 Howe Crescent. The car's there. The girl's in the back."

At about this time Mr. Caversham and Roger were opening up the front office at Trembling's. Roger seemed to be suffering from a hangover. Mr. Caversham appeared to be normal.

"It was some party," said Roger. "One of the old buffers who was on the first tour organized it. A reunion—can you imagine it?"

"I can," said Mr. Caversham, with a slight shudder.

"The idea was, we had a bottle of booze from each of the countries we'd visited. All nine of them. We finished them, too. And that girl I was telling you about—the one on the first tour—"

The bell behind Mr. Caversham's desk rang.

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"What does *he* want," said Roger. "He's never been in before ten o'clock since I've been here."

The bell rang again. Mr. Caversham sighed, put down the three-color triptych, advertising an economy tour in the Costa Brava, and made his way along the passage.

Mr. Trembling was sitting behind his desk. His face was half hidden by his hand. When he spoke his voice was under careful control.

"Have you any idea were Miss Davies is?"

"Hasn't she got here yet?"

"No," said Mr. Trembling. "I telephoned her house. The lady there was most upset. Lucilla hadn't been back all night. They've just telephoned the police."

"How *very* worrying," said Mr. Caversham. "But I expect she'll turn up. Mr. Foster was saying how sorry the Rotarians were to miss your speech last night."

For a moment it seemed that Mr. Trembling hadn't heard. Then he raised his head slowly, and Mr. Caversham saw his face. If he had not known what he did, he might have felt sorry for him.

"Yes," said Mr. Trembling. "I was sorry to disappoint them. I felt unwell at the last moment. A touch of gastric trouble."

"You ought to have gone straight home. Not come back to the office," said Mr. Caversham severely. "There's only one place when your stomach's upset. In bed, with a hot water bottle."

What was left of the color in it had drained out of Mr. Trembling's face. The pouches under his eyes were livid. Mr. Caversham thought, for a moment, that he might be going to faint, and took half a step forward.

"What do you mean?" It was a croak, barely audible.

In his most reasonable voice Mr. Caversham said, "I left my wallet in my desk and had to come back for it. I happened to see your car in the yard and a light on in the office. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes," said Mr. Trembling, with an effort. "I'm all right. That'll be all."

It won't be all, Mr. Caversham thought to himself, as he walked back. Not by a long chalk, it won't. You set a trap for her, didn't you? Let her see where you kept the key. Let her see you take something out of that parcel and put it in the safe. Let her know you were going to be away at a Rotarian meeting. Came back and caught her. She must have told you she was meeting me. Perhaps she did it in an attempt to save her own life. So when you'd finished, when she was no longer your secretary, no longer anything but a lump of dead flesh, you put her in her own car, and drove her out to my place. Not very friendly. Then, I suppose, you rang up the police. Lucky you didn't do it ten minutes earlier. *I* should have been in trouble.

By this time Mr. Caversham was

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back in the shop. Mr. Belton was talking to a girl with a ponytail about day trips to Boulogne, and a sour old man was wating in front of Mr. Caversham's desk with a complaint about British Railways. Mr. Caversham dealt with him dexterously enough, but his mind was not entirely on his work.

Most of it was on the clock.

The police, he knew, worked to a fairly rigid pattern. Fingerprinting and photography came first, then the pathologist. Then the immediate inquiries. These would be at Lucilla's lodgings. How long would all that take? A couple of hours perhaps. Then they would come to the place where she worked. Then things would really start to happen. No doubt about that.

"Where's that Roger?" said Belton.

"He was here earlier this morning," said Mr. Caversham. "I expect he's somewhere about."

"He's not meant to be gadding about. He's meant to be helping me," said Mr. Belton. "I don't know what's come over this place, lately. No organization."

It was nearly twelve o'clock before Roger reappeared. He was apologetic, but impertinent. Nor did he explain where he had been. Mr. Caversham said, "Now that you are here, I'll go out and get lunch, if no one has any objections."

No one had any objections. Mr. Caversham hurried into the public house down the street and ordered sandwiches. He was back within twenty-five minutes, and found a worried Mr. Belton alone.

"I'm glad you've got back so quickly," he said.

"What's up?"

"I wish I knew. Mr. Trembling isn't answering his telephone. And Roger seems to have disappeared."

A prickle of apprehension touched the back of Mr. Caversham's neck.

"Which way?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I asked you," said Mr. Caversham, in a new and very urgent voice, "which way Roger went. Did he go out of the front door into the street?"

"No. He went out down the passage. Into the back yard, I should guess. What's happening? What is it all about, Mr. Caversham? What's going on, for God's sake?"

People had sometimes accused Mr. Caversham of being hard to the point of insensitivity. He did, however, appreciate that he was dealing with a badly frightened man, and at that moment, when there was so much to be done, he paused to comfort him.

"There's nothing here which need bother you," he said. "I promise you that. Indeed, I should say that right now you were the only person in this whole outfit who had nothing to worry about. Just keep the customers happy."

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He disappeared through the door behind the counter, leaving Mr. Belton staring after him.

The door of the Founder's Room was closed, but not locked. Mr. Caversham opened it, without knocking, and looked inside. Arthur Trembling was seated in his tall chair behind his desk. He looked quite natural until you went close, and saw the small neat hole which the bullet had made under the left ear, and the rather larger, jagged hole which it had made coming out of the right-hand side of the head.

Mr. Caversham sat on the corner of the desk and dialed a number. A gruff voice answered at once.

"Southampton Police," said Mr. Caversham calmly. "I'm speaking from the offices of Trembling's Tours. Yes, Trembling's. In Fawcet Street. Mr. Trembling has been shot. About ten minutes ago."

The voice at the other end tried to say something, but Mr. Caversham overrode it.

"The man responsible for the killing is using the name of Roger Roche. He's thirty, looks much younger, has untidy, light hair, and is lodging at 45 Alma Crescent. Have you got that?"

"Who's that speaking?"

"Never mind me. Have you got that information? Because you'll have to act on it at once. Send someone to his lodgings, have the trains watched, and the roads blocked."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't," said Mr. Caversham, "but I told you what to do to catch this murderer, and if you don't do it quickly, you're going to be sorry."

He rang off and cast an eye round the office. There was no sign of any disturbance. A neat, cold, professional killing. If Mr. Belton had heard nothing, the gun must have been a silenced automatic.

The key was in the safe. Using a pencil, Mr. Caversham turned it, then carefully swung the safe door open. On the bottom shelf was a quarto-sized volume, in a plain gray binding, with no title.

He carried it to the desk and opened it. There was a blatant Teutonic crudity about the photographs inside which made even such an unimpressionable man as Mr. Caversham wrinkle his nose. He was still examining the book when a police car drew up in the yard, and Sergeant Lowther burst into the room.

"Ah," he said. "I might have known you'd be in on this one too. What's that you've got there? Yes, I see. *Very* pretty. Now, Mr. Caversham, perhaps you'll do some explaining."

"Not to you," said Mr. Caversham. He had heard another car draw up in the yard. A few seconds later Inspector Hamish came through the door. He looked coldly at Mr. Caversham.

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"Have you picked him up, yet?" asked Mr. Caversham.

"I got some garbled message," said the Inspector, "about a man called Roger Roche. I thought I'd come and find out what it was all about before sounding a general alarm."

Mr. Caversham got to his feet. "Do you mean to say," he said, and there was a cold ferocity in his voice which made even the Inspector stare, "that you have wasted ten whole minutes? If that's right, you're going to have something to answer for."

"Look here—"

"Would you ask the Sergeant to leave the room, please."

Inspector Hamish hesitated, then said, "One minute, Sergeant—"

By the time he turned back, Mr. Caversham had taken something from his pocket. The Inspector looked at it and said in quite a different tone of voice, "Well, Mr. Calder, if I'd only known—"

"That'll be the epitaph of the British Empire," said Mr. Calder. "Will you please, please get the wheels turning."

"Yes, of course. I'd better use the telephone."

An hour later Mr. Calder and Inspector Hamish were sitting in the Founder's Room. The photographers and fingerprint men had come and gone. The pathologist had taken charge of the body; and a police cordon, thrown round Southampton a good deal too late, had failed to catch Roger Roche.

"We'll pick him up," said the Inspector.

"I doubt it," said Mr. Calder. "People like that aren't picked up easily. He'll be in France by this evening and God knows where by tomorrow."

"If someone had only told me—"

"There were faults on both sides," Mr. Calder admitted. "I expect I should have told you last night. There didn't seem any hurry at the time and I didn't know about Roger, then."

"If you wouldn't mind explaining," said the Inspector, "In words of one syllable. I am only a simple policeman, you know."

"Let's begin at the beginning then," said Mr. Calder. "You knew that Trembling was smuggling in pornographic books for his brother to sell?"

"Yes. We're onto that now. There's a side entrance into his shop, from the ground-floor office next door. The cash customers used to go in that way after the shop was shut, and out by a back entrance into the mews. You'd be surprised if I told you the names of some of his customers."

"I doubt it," said Mr. Calder. "However, it wasn't an easy secret to keep. Too many couriers were involved. Soviet Intelligence got onto it. They put in an agent—Lucilla Davies—to nurse it along. She blackmailed Trembling. He could go on bringing in his dirty

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books, as long as he agreed to take out letters—and other things as well—for them. Trembling's became the main South Coast post office for the Russians."

"Neat," said the Inspector.

"Then our side got to hear about it, too. And sent me down. What happened was that Trembling got tired of being blackmailed into treason, and decided to remove Lucilla. I don't blame him for that, but I do blame him for leaving her in my front drive. I thought that was unnecessary. And very cramping for me. So I shifted her. However, I did ring up and tell you where to find her next morning."

"That was you, too, was it?"

"That was me. I thought if we played it properly, we'd be bound to provoke a countermove from the other side. They don't like their agents being bumped off. I guessed they'd send one of their best men down here—what I didn't realize was that he was *already* here. Roger fooled me completely."

"There's a moral to it somewhere, no doubt," said the Inspector.

"The moral," said Mr. Calder, "is that if the various Intelligence Departments and M.I.5. and the Special Branch and ninety-six different police forces didn't all try to work independently of each other, but cooperated for a change, we might get better results."

"You'd better put that in your report," said Inspector Hamish. "Not that anyone'll take any notice."

"I'll put it in," said Mr. Calder. "But it won't do a blind bit of good."

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TALE OF THE PRETERNATURAL

"There is so much I want to know!" the old man exclaimed. "So much I might be able to understand—if—if only I had time."

THE QUEERODDS

by DON KNOWLTON

"BY ALL MEANS HUMOR HIM," SAID the doctor. "It can do no possible harm."

They were sitting on the porch, in the shade of the wisteria vine—Marjorie and her mother and the doctor. All three were looking out across the lawn toward the man who sat in a wheel chair, under the little maple. The September sun cast long afternoon shadows on the grass and painted the beeches at the brow of the hill a golden yellow.

"But, Doctor," objected Marjorie, "can't *something* be done? Those delusions of his—they're so pitiful."

The doctor shook his head.

"They go with the disease. Marjorie, face the facts. Your grandfather can't live more than a few months more, and he could die in a matter of days. Indulge his ramblings, if they give him pleasure."

"That whiskey he drinks every afternoon," said Marjorie's mother. "Don't you think—I mean, doesn't it add—"

"You mean," the doctor broke in, "that it's the whiskey, rather than the disease that befuddles him? I doubt it. It can't hurt him much, and he enjoys it. The wonder of it is that he can still pour without spilling. Look!"

Beside the wheel chair was a little table and on it were a glass, a bottle, and a pitcher of iced water. They watched an old arm reach out—a hand shaking like a leaf—watched it tip first the bottle, and then the pitcher, into the glass.

"Can he walk at all without help?" asked the doctor.

"Not any more," replied Marjorie's mother.

Marjorie stifled a sob. Her mother put an arm around her.

"Marjorie, dear," she said, "he has been failing very fast while you were away."

Marjorie had gone to work in the city after the death of her father. Now she was spending her vacation at home, taking care of her grandfather, so that the regular nurse could get a much-needed rest.

"It's so—so disconcerting," Mar-

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jorie told the doctor. "Grandfather had such a fine mind, such a range of knowledge, and when he—well, it's a tragic thing to see happen. You feel as if you ought to tell him he's just imagining those things, and yet—"

"What sort of things does he imagine?" asked the doctor.

"Well, for one thing, sometimes he knows that I am me, and sometimes he thinks I'm mother, and sometimes he thinks I'm grandmother. I never know by what name he's going to call me."

"The confusion of names isn't serious," said the doctor. "Many old people who have nothing really wrong with them do that. What else?"

"The conversations," said Marjorie.

"Conversations?"

"Yes. Every now and then, when he's sitting out there as he is now, I can hear him talking, and it sounds just as if he were talking to someone. He doesn't do it when there's anybody around, only when he's alone. It's uncanny."

"Well, now," the doctor observed, "I don't see what's strange about that. Many people who are neither old nor sick talk to themselves."

"But that's not it," said Marjorie. "I'm sure he thinks he is actually carrying on a conversation with somebody. You can tell it by—well, by the inflections in his voice and the way he nods his head and gestures."

The doctor smiled. "My dear," he said, "I'm afraid it is you who are suffering from a delusion. There's nothing more serious?"

"No—except that when he talks to me he jumps from subject to subject and forgets where he was and then his thoughts seem to come out all scrambled up."

"And that will get progressively worse," predicted the doctor. "Mental aberrations must be expected."

The old gentleman, Marjorie found, had a routine to which he clung with indomitable firmness.

He slept late, had a breakfast of tea and toast, and read the newspaper; later he ate a light lunch; and then, at two o'clock sharp, he insisted on being wheeled out to his favorite place under the little maple tree.

There he sat, with whiskey and water on the table beside him, until nearly sunset—sat and sipped, sipped and sat—drinking not much, but steadily, and demanding for the most part to be left alone.

Then came dinner. He ate heartily, said little, and went to bed.

That was the old man's day.

It all focused on the solitary afternoon under the little maple. When it rained, so that he could not keep that daily vigil, he was furious. Those were the difficult days. Fortunately that September was kind. For the most part, the sun shone with a soft haze, warm, but not burning.

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The wheel chair in which the old man sat faced a downhill slope overhanging a broad valley. In the distance were the steeples of churches, and the reds and browns of roofs, and the skylines of oaks and elms. No wonder, thought Marjorie, that grandfather loves just to sit and look and look. But why does he object to having anybody near him, while he looks? And why, almost every afternoon, does he start that talking? To himself, as the doctor thinks—or, as she believed, to someone he imagines to be with him?

There was, in his articulation, in his mannerisms, not the slightest hint of mental deterioration. His big frame was pinned down—but his arms could move eloquently, seeming to reinforce a well-phrased and cogent point. Beneath the thatch of white hair his shrewd gray eyes twinkled, and there were little wrinkles of laughter around their corners. And that voice! No quaver of senility, no perceptible fuzziness. It had the timbre of a man who was sure of himself. That was what made his hallucinations tear so hard at the heart strings.

One afternoon—it was just a week after Marjorie had "taken over"—he suddenly called to her from his station under the little maple tree.

"Bring a chair down here!" he said. "I want to talk to you."

Marjorie had a moment of foreboding. This was something new. Up until now he had always wanted to be alone. She planted herself on a camp stool at his feet and looked up at him—waiting and wondering.

"You see," he said—and there was a most quizzical look on his face—"my friends have gone away for a day or two. I thought you might keep me company."

"Your friends?" asked Marjorie.

"Yes," he said. "The Queerodds."

(Humor him, the doctor had said.)

"But who," asked Marjorie, "are the—what did you call them, the Queerodds?"

"That is exactly what I am going to tell you. But first you must make a promise—and I am very serious about this. Will you solemnly swear that you will not reveal one word of what I am about to tell you to your mother or to the doctor?"

"I swear," agreed Marjorie.

"The reason is very simple," he went on. "I do not wish to be thought insane. They would think I've lost my mind. But you, Marjorie—you know better."

"Yes, Grandfather," she said—and it cost her a pang to say it.

"Well! I'll start at the beginning. I was sitting here one afternoon, just looking out over the valley, and suddenly I saw something moving—down there under one of the beech trees. It was soon joined by another moving something. What they were, I couldn't imagine

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—for I could see right through them!"

Marjorie felt prickles up the back of her spine.

"And then," continued her grandfather, "I heard them talking!"

He chuckled. "Oh, it was most uncanny. I thought at first they were illusions, but they wouldn't go away. They were there the next day too. Apparently they were beings of some sort. That's very queer, I said to myself, that's very odd. And so I called them the Queerodds."

He mixed a shaky drink of whiskey and water.

"To cut the story short, one day I called out to them, and they came over. We've been talking our heads off ever since. At least, *my* head—Queerodds don't have heads, really."

Marjorie felt a sinking feeling. But she looked up bravely, with a question on her lips—to find her grandfather staring into the sky.

"Did you see those swallows go by?" he asked. "Sometimes I think the flight of the swallow is the most beautiful thing in the world. I remember, once, when you were a little girl—"

He trailed off—lost in a remembrance. Here was Marjorie's chance to bring the conversation back to reality. But an overwhelming curiosity possessed her.

"About the Queerodds," she said.

"Oh, yes—the Queerodds. Well, as I said, they *are* beings. I wouldn't exactly call them persons, and yet they are, in a way. But you see, they have no bodies."

"But you said you could see them—"

"I could see motion. There was a central something or other, and reaching out from that were—well, let us say, tentacles of influence. Do I make myself clear?"

As Marjorie stared, he broke into delighted laughter.

"Dear girl," he said, "I'll try to explain it, but I know I won't be able to, because the terminology is too deep for you and I myself don't really understand what they've told me. Let me put it this way—a Queerodd is a coordinated agglomeration of related electrical neuclei, endowed with consciousness and a personality. How's that for utter confusion?"

And he laughed again.

"Dear me," he said. "Mary, remember that time I tried to explain the Einstein theory to you, and we wound up going swimming?"

A strange look came over his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Marjorie," he said. "For a moment I thought you were Mary. Sometimes I forget—"

Again there was silence.

"You were saying," persisted Marjorie, "about the Queerodds—"

"What does a Queerodd look like? Well, I'll tell you. If you ever saw a diagram of lines of force in a magnetic field, that's about it. As I said, there's a center, or a core, or

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whatever you want to call it, and things extending out from it that correspond, in a way, to multiple arms. Only there's no substance there—that is, no substance as we know it. You see, a Queerodd is a living unit of electrical energy."

"But I don't understand—"

"Neither do I, Marjorie. That's what makes it all so fascinating."

Long shadows had begun to slope across the lawn. Marjorie looked hard at the trees, at the sky, at the grass. She needed the reassurance of reality.

"Of course, these Queerodds are just visiting here," her grandfather went on. "They came to Earth for their vacation."

"From where?"

"Ah," said the old man, "I wish I knew! They've tried to tell me, but I can't make it out. We have no words in our language that will fit, and I don't understand theirs."

"Do they speak English?"

"Damon does. Oh, I forgot to tell you. I call them Damon and Pythias. Pythias has trouble with English, but Damon is very fluent. He had a year at Oxford."

"At Oxford!"

"Yes. Of course, nobody knew he was there—he was invisible. He attended whatever courses interested him. It seems he was sent there to do a survey and make a report. On how and what we were doing."

"A report! To whom?"

"That's what I can't figure out," replied her grandfather. "To some sort of a superintendent, as I gather it. But it's all very vague in my mind. Marjorie, all I can tell you is that—well, our concept of things is completely cockeyed. They're not at all the way we think they are."

And then, suddenly, it began to rain. That was all for that day. But the next afternoon—should she, or shouldn't she? Would it be right to encourage him? She decided it could do no harm, and besides, she wanted to know more.

"Grandfather," she asked, "when the Queerodds come back, do you think I could see them and talk to them?"

"Bless my soul," said her grandfather, "I should have explained all that. No, Marjorie, I am probably the only person in this whole world who can hear and see the Queerodds."

He looked at her sharply. But her face revealed no hint of what was passing through her mind.

"And it is purely by accident, by coincidence," her grandfather continued. "Damon and Pythias happened to choose that particular spot of grass under the beech trees as a meeting place. On mornings each would go out scouting on his own, and then afternoons they would meet here and compare notes. Meanwhile, I happened to have contracted a progressive disease of the nerves. In its later stages—and that's where I am now—the nerves governing the senses become inflamed, and for a time this height-

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ens their sensitivity. So when the Queerodds arrived, my sight and my hearing had developed an acuteness and range far beyond normal human experience."

Hearing things and seeing things, thought Marjorie.

"There's really no mystery about it," said the old man. "You know that there are sounds pitched so high that people can't hear them, but dogs can? Well, the Queerodds talk way up there, and I can hear them. I can hear even higher than dogs."

He grinned at her mischievously.

"Startles you, eh? Well, Marjorie, now let's consider sight. You know there are light waves of varying lengths. Well, when they get too short they don't register on the human eye. That's how it is with the Queerodds. You might say that they are of an invisible color—invisible, that is, to everybody except me."

Suddenly he sat up straight.

"I know all about the course of my disease," he said fiercely. "This hypersensitivity means that I am very close to the end. But for the short time I have left—what an incredible experience!"

But then he fell back, limp and tired.

"Martha," he said a moment later in a querulous new tone, "if I stop on the way home and get some mince meat, will you bake me a mince pie?"

So it went for the rest of that afternoon—and for several afternoons thereafter.

Sometimes he was living in a house by the sea, with Grandmother Mary, before Marjorie's mother had been born. Once he was even back in school, as a boy. Now and then he would suddenly discuss current events he had read in the morning paper—these were what Marjority termed the "in-between periods." But for the most part they talked about the Queerodds.

According to them, said her grandfather, the Earth was a rather remote place. Nobody had ever been here until someone called Jorm Cat (least, that was how the name sounded) had stopped off a few trillion years ago.

This Jorm, it seemed, had done a favor for something or somebody; so in return he asked for and got permission to use the Earth as an experimental station.

"Like a research doctor," explained the old man, "starting a germ culture in a test tube."

As the years rolled on—millions of them—Jorm's Folly (as it became known) attracted the interest of a few intrepid individuals who liked to investigate strange, far places. Some of them made trips to Earth—in much the same spirit, at first, as Stanley explored Africa.

Jorm himself never came back. He had been busy, 'way off at the other end.

"End of what?" asked Marjorie.

"That's just it," said her grand-

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father. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

But Jorm had finally decided that the time had come to check up on his experiment. He had sent Damon to do the checking—that was almost a hundred years ago. Damon had realized, soon after his arrival, that he would have to understand a language—at least, one—to know what was going on. And that he could save himself a lot of work by attaching himself to a seat of learning. Hence his year in Oxford.

"You ought to hear him talk!" said Marjorie's grandfather in great glee. "That incredibly high-pitched, squeaky voice, with an Oxford accent and an academic vocabulary!"

"But if they haven't any bodies," said Marjorie, "how can they talk?"

"A nice point," agreed her grandfather. "But they can. It's just a matter of producing electrical vibrations in the air. But between themselves, the Queerodds don't have to talk—they just broadcast."

"What do you mean?" asked Marjorie.

"Each Queerodd has a built-in sending and receiving station," explained her grandfather. "A sort of walkie-talkie. But they don't have to go through all that monkey business of translating ether waves into sound waves. They just use the ether waves. Although the Queerodds tell me that this ether idea of ours is completely wrong, that it isn't that way at all."

Damon, according to Marjorie's grandfather, had just got word from home that they must return shortly.

"Home?" asked Marjorie.

"Perhaps a hundred thousand lightyears away," murmured her grandfather.

"But in that case they couldn't *just* get word," objected Marjorie. "It would take a hundred thousand years to get here!"

"That's what *we* think," said her grandfather. "What is time, Marjorie?"

"Why," she said, "time is—time is—"

"I'll tell you," he went on. "Time is just a means of measuring motion. If there were no motion, there would be no time. Think it over."

She thought it over—and the world seemed to be turning upside down.

"Now the Queerodds," said her grandfather, "have got this time proposition licked, and I'd certainly like to know how. It's strange, but motion and time are like life and death, in a way. If there were no life, there would be no death. The Queerodds have figured out something about death, too."

"You mean they don't die?" asked Marjorie.

"Not in our sense of the word," he said. "That's one of their troubles and regrets. And it's one of the reasons they let their bodies dwindle away to nothing, like a polliwog's tail—they didn't need to

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propogate. There are some things that they envy us a lot, Marjorie. And what's more, the Queerodds are not indestructible. Earth is a dangerous place for them today. They have to be very careful."

"Oh?"

"A Queerodd doesn't dare get too close to a high tension wire or a powerful radio station. Why, if the government knew there were Queerodds here, and got alarmed, it could jam them right out of existence—the way the Russians do the Voice of America. So the Queerodds try very hard not to reveal themselves. My case was an accident—and they're not worried about me because I'll only live a few days more, and nobody would believe me anyhow."

"But if no person with normal senses can see them or hear them," Marjorie asked, "how would anybody ever imagine—"

"They can move things, or lift things," her grandfather explained. "They have no muscles, of course, as we know them, but—well, you have seen a magnet move a nail. But they don't touch things, as a rule, because they don't want to cause trouble. They're really very decent codgers, the Queerodds."

He began to chuckle.

"They've had to be careful about whom they allowed to come here," he said. "It seems that in past years some of their visitors here were practical jokers. They couldn't resist playing pranks. Remember witches? And fairies? And poltergeists? I'll bet it was the Queerodds. And just think what they may have gotten away with in table rapping and spirit writing and all that!"

The old man turned suddenly serious.

"There is so much I want to know!" he exclaimed. "So much I might be able to understand—if—if I only had time!"

"Now, Grandfather," Marjorie said, "don't talk like that. You—"

"It isn't my impending death that I'm talking about," he interrupted. "What concerns me is that Damon and Pythias have got to go back, and right away! They'll meet here—under the beech trees, they told me—for a final conference, and I'll have a chance to talk to them once more before they leave. But then they'll be gone—and I'll wonder and wonder—"

So, finally, came the last day of Marjorie's stay. As usual, she had set her camp stool before her grandfather's wheel chair, under the little maple. As yet they had said little. The old man was looking dreamily out over the valley, with its church steeples, its reds and browns of roofs, its skylines of oaks and elms.

Suddenly he sat up straight.

"Marjorie!" he exclaimed. "They're back!"

He was starting intently toward the beech trees. Marjorie caught

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herself looking too—and actually feeling surprised that she saw nothing.

"Please," said the old man.

She knew what he meant. Slowly she went back to the house. As she stepped onto the porch she heard her grandfather's voice. He was talking . . .

When, at the end of the afternoon, she went out to wheel him back in for dinner, she found him in a strange state of excitement.

"They're leaving in a day or two," he said. "It seems that the reports Damon has been sending back about what's going on here in scientific progress have the authorities worried. They want more details. When they learned that we were splitting atoms—"

He broke off. He reached out and seized her shoulders, turned her toward him.

"But here's what's important," he said. "And you must never say a word—remember? When they go, *they have asked me to go with them*. They have contrived a way. Do you realize what that might mean? What I might learn? What I might come to understand? Why, Marjorie—"

"Dinner's on the table!" called Marjorie's mother, from the porch.

Marjorie tucked her grandfather into bed that night and said good night. As she left his room he gave her a prodigious wink, and put his fingers to his lips.

The regular nurse returned that evening, as expected, and early the next morning, before her grandfather was awake, Marjorie took the train back to the city and to her job.

As the countryside flew past and the cars banged over the crossings, Marjorie resolutely set herself to the task of relegating to its proper place a world of fantasy. But it was difficult. The trouble was, she realized, that he had been so rational about it all. No, she reminded herself, he wasn't rational, he was *ir*rational. Would you call it a case of logical insanity?

Then she was at the office, with two weeks of work piled up, and new gossip, and rush-rush. And a phone call, with the voice on the line that she most wanted to hear, saying, "Can you have dinner with me tonight?"

Within a day Marjorie was back in reality.

At her mother's house the days remained warm and sunny, and every afternoon the nurse wheeled the old man out under the little maple tree.

The doctor phoned.

"How is he?" he asked.

"Just the same," replied the nurse, "except that I think he's drinking a little more whiskey, and he's talking to himself more. And he still insists on being left alone when he's out there."

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"There's nothing to do but wait," said the doctor.

On the afternoon of the third day, when the shadows had grown long across the grass, the nurse went out to wheel the old man in for dinner. Instead she cried out, and hurried back into the house.

"He's gone!" she called—and Marjorie's mother came running.

They called the doctor; but they knew there was no use. Marjorie's grandfather was indeed gone—with what looked like a twinkle in his wide open eyes and an expression of eagerness on his face.

It was a little later, when the doctor and Marjorie's mother were having coffee, that the nurse came over to them, carrying a book. There was a puzzled look on her face.

"This book," she said, "was out there on the table, along with his whiskey and water."

The doctor picked it up. It was titled *The New Cosmos.*

"Yes, he had me send for it," said Marjorie's mother. "It's something deep, by one of those atomic scientists. It came in the mail, and I took it out to him."

"Look on the flyleaf," said the nurse.

Across the flyleaf was written, in pencil, in a firm hand,

Marjorie, I've decided to go with them.

The three stared at each other.

"How strange!" said Marjorie's mother.

"There was no pencil or pen on the table," said the nurse, in a half-choked voice.

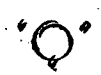
"And he hasn't been able to write for the last six months!" added the doctor. "With those shaky hands—why, he couldn't even *hold* a pencil or pen!"

"Then, who," asked Marjorie's mother, "could have written that message?"

For some time there was silence.

"It's certainly queer," said Marjorie's mother.

"Very odd," agreed the doctor.



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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JAMES M. ULLMAN**
TITLE:	***The Stock Market Mystery***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Michael Dane James and Ted Bennett
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Another adventure of the stock market detectives: the stock of Sundown Gold Mines has been going up steadily for the past two years—but there is no longer any such company in existence!*

ED COLBY, FINANCIAL EDITOR OF one of Chicago's daily newspapers, slumped in a chair in the New York office of Michael Dane James.

James, a crew-cut, broad-shouldered, slightly overweight man in his late forties, straightened a pair of horn-rimmed glasses on his pug nose. He smiled.

"Ed, if you're seeking another interview with an industrial espionage expert," James said cordially but cautiously, "you're out of luck. I told you all about my tape recorders and electronic bugs the last time I was in Chicago. I have to keep *some* professional secrets, you know. Unless you want me to expound, strictly off the record, on the current immorality I find in allegedly high and respectable places . . ."

Colby shook his head. He was short, thin, and compact, with unruly brown hair and a craggy countenance masked by a deceptively placid expression.

"Not this time, Mickey. I'm in New York to cover a convention of investment bankers. But I've also been authorized by the *Chicago Express* to engage your services. We have a security force of our own, but I persuaded management that under the circumstances,

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someone with your far-out talents may be more in order."

"What's the trouble? One of your newspaper competitors stealing your scoops before you can get them into print?"

"Nothing like that." Colby paused. "Did you ever hear of a stock called Sundown?"

"No," James admitted. "My associate, Ted Bennett, is the stock speculator in this organization. I keep up with the market, but Sundown is a new one to me."

"I don't wonder. There is no such company, although there used to be. Sundown Gold Mines. According to the research department of my brokerage house, a firm with that name was founded in 1924, in Denver, Colorado. For a while it was even listed on a stock exchange. But Sundown dissolved in 1937 when the mine ran out of gold. The stock is worthless. There hasn't been a recorded trade in Sundown in a quarter of a century."

"How does this involve the *Express?*"

The financial editor rubbed a hand over the back of his neck. Wryly, he smiled.

"I have discovered," he said, "that for the past two years our newspaper has been printing quotations on Sundown stock."

"Fake listings in your stock tables?"

"Exactly. Sundown turns up once or twice a week in our noon tables, which appear in our mid-day edition. Never in the early edition, which carries the opening prices, and never in the late edition, with the closing prices. Just the mid-day edition."

"But that table comes by wire from New York, doesn't it? In which case the same table goes to other newspapers all over the country. Surely, someone somewhere would have spotted a fake quote by now. In fact, it's doubtful Sundown would ever clear New York more than once."

"The quotations on Sundown," the financial editor said, "are not transmitted to us on the wire from New York. Lines of type containing the Sundown quotes are sneaked into our stock table in our own composing room, by someone on our newspaper. Which is why we want to hire you. To learn who's doing it. And, more important, why. Because the whole thing smacks of some kind of swindle, with the swindlers using our stock tables as part of their scheme."

In shirtsleeves, Ted Bennett strolled through the composing room of the *Chicago Express*. A tall, lean, tousle-headed man who looked younger than his forty years, he carried a clipboard in one hand and a pencil in the other. Now and then he stopped to make indecipherable notes.

Activity in the composing room was increasing as the lockup dead-

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line for the mid-day edition neared. Most pages had already been closed. Only a few pages—late news, late sports, and late markets—remained to be assembled.

Bennett stopped before a Linotype machine. Operated automatically, the machine cast lines of type in response to perforations on a tape. The tape, punched by impulses transmitted by wire from New York, was setting a portion of the stock market tables.

"Spooky, isn't it," Bennett observed to the Linotype operator, who was staring at the machine. "A guy in New York setting type in Chicago by punching a keyboard."

"It's progress," the operator replied woodenly. He looked up and scowled. "Who," he asked slowly, "did you say you were again?"

"Efficiency expert," Bennett explained.

This satisfied the operator, who shrugged. Bennett walked away. He had learned, by glancing at the completed lines of type, that the S section of the stock table had cleared the machine.

In a few moments the operator rose, picked up the type, and carried it in a galley to a long metal table. There a proof-boy picked up the galley, pulled proofs, and deposited the galley on another long metal table.

Bennett walked by for another look. After four days in the composing room he was quite expert at reading small type upside down. He ascertained that Sundown was not among the stocks beginning with S. Which meant that if Sundown did turn up in the paper that day, the Lino operator and the proof boy, the two people who had handled the type so far, were probably innocent.

Bennett obtained a carton of milk at a vending machine. He glanced toward the section of the composing room where the financial pages were being assembled. The job, performed by two printers, was supervised by an assistant financial editor.

One of the two financial printers walked to the long table, picked up the stock list galley, and brought it back. He began placing the type into the page, a section at a time. As he worked, other printers brought him galleys containing corrections.

Bennett finished his milk and walked over for another look at the S section. Still no Sundown.

Ed Colby came downstairs from the editorial department and obtained a paper cup of coffee from the machine. He and Bennett stood in a corner, where they would not be overheard.

"It's been nearly a week," Colby said. "We're long overdue for another quote on Sundown. Unless our man is wise to you."

"If he is," Bennett replied, "we'll have to subcontract a private detective with a printer's union card.

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But I can see where almost anyone could slip a line of type into the listings. With all the people in this composing room, and printers making corrections everywhere you look, the type is touched by a lot of hands before the page is finally locked up."

Bennett lit a cigarette. "But you'd think," he went on, "some stockbroker or other sophisticated investor in your circulation area would have spotted the fake quotes long ago."

"It's not so unreasonable," Colby argued. "The mid-day edition is printed mainly for flash newsstand sales and rail distribution to distant out-of-town points. The market pros hardly glance at the quotations in that edition. They get up-to-date quotes from their brokers. And one fake mid-day quote buried in all that tiny type—what casual reader would spot it? Most investors look only for quotes on their own stocks, anyhow. After all, much the same thing happened in New York once, when some jokers invented an imaginary college and telephoned football scores on mythical games to the newspapers on Saturday afternoons. Why couldn't it happen with a stock? Besides, Sundown doesn't appear every day. Just once in a while, with a small volume of trade shown, as though on most days the stock didn't appear because there weren't any trades."

"How did you get wise to this?"

"One day I arrived late. I glanced at the mid-day table to see what was happening and spotted Sundown. I got mildly curious as to what business a firm with so strange a name could be in. So I looked for Sundown in my Stock Guide, but couldn't find it. Which gave me a queasy feeling, because almost any stock traded anywhere is in the Stock Guide. I checked our back copies and found other Sundown quotes, in the mid-day editions only. I notified management; they assigned someone to check further. We learned the first fake Sundown listing was inserted in our table nearly two years ago. It didn't appear again for nearly a month. But after that it appeared with increasing frequency."

"What was Sundown selling for in the original quote?"

"Four."

"And what is it now?"

"That's another ominous thing. Each time a fake Sundown quote appears, the price goes up—a small fraction at a time. The last quote was 29⅜. If Sundown was a real stock, you could make your fortune in it, because the price never declines."

Colby dropped his coffee cup into a trash basket and went back upstairs.

The page with the stock table was being locked into the form. Bennet strolled by. Sundown was not in the table. Bennett made more notations on his clipboard.

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A tall, heavy-set printer—Bennet had studied photographs of the composing room personnel and recognized him as a man named Leo Carter—rolled the page away on its truck to be matted.

Bennett was about to leave for lunch when Carter stopped, unlocked the form, and ran his hand over the type on the stock-table page, as though making a final adjustment. Then Carter locked the form again and shoved the truck into a line of other trucks.

Bennett waited until Carter was out of sight, then he walked to the page and looked at it.

A line of type with a quotation for Sundown was in the stock table now, inserted in correct alphabetical order. According to the fake quote, two hundred shares of Sundown had changed hands at 29½, up one-eighth. The only man who could have put the line there was Leo Carter.

Michael Dane James studied the report on his desk. He pushed an intercom button.

"Get me Bennett in Chicago," he ordered. "He's a late sleeper. He's probably still in his hotel room."

A moment later Bennett came on the line.

"Anything new," James asked, "on this printer, Leo Carter?"

"Only what you know already. He's under surveillance. But outwardly he leads an unblemished life. Married, three kids, small house in the suburbs. Regarded as a highly efficient worker, one of the best printers in the shop. Quiet type, with few friends, but a real tough cookie. He won a flock of medals in the war. All we know for sure is, he's a native of Baldwin, Indiana. He apprenticed out as a printer after the war, and he's been a printer ever since. That's not much help. Unless something happens soon, I think we should brace him with what we know and try to get him to talk."

"Not yet," James replied. "In the first place, I don't think he will talk. At worst, he'd just lose his job, and if he's as good a printer as you say, he'd have no trouble getting another one. In the second place, if we braced him, the people working this scheme, whatever it is, would be put on their guard, and we might never learn the truth. And in the third place, we've got a new lead. I'm flying to Chicago this afternoon. Meanwhile, you're going to drive out of town."

"What's up?"

"I've been doing research into the old Sundown Gold Mines Company, on the possibility the name wasn't selected by accident. It turns out the last secretary of Sundown Gold Mines, the man who held the position when Sundown went broke in 1937, was a man named Franklin Carter. Same name as our printer, Leo Carter."

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"It could be coincidence."

"But it isn't. Franklin Carter was a bachelor who became moderately prominent in Colorado in the 1930s. He died in Denver, in 1946. He was a native of Baldwin, Indiana, our printer's home town. And when he died, his estate and possessions went to his relatives in Baldwin." James paused. "What'll you bet, Ted, that among his possessions were piles of blank old stock certificates for Sundown Gold Mines, which he saved as a remembrance? And that somebody is now filling in those certificates and doing something with them? Because if you were planning a stock swindle, you'd need some authentic-looking stocks as a prop."

"You want me to drive to Baldwin?"

"Right. Carter must have a flock of kinfolk there. What's more, the *Express* circulation department tells me Baldwin is one of the towns where the mid-day edition is shipped by train. And even more significant, the news agency in Baldwin sells three times more copies of the *Express* than any other town its size in that part of the state. It just might be that some people in Baldwin are buying the *Express* in order to keep up with those phoney Sundown quotations."

At 4:30 that afternoon Bennett walked into the newspaper agency in Baldwin, Indiana. He browsed through magazines until the other customers left. Then he approached the counter, tended by a husky young man wearing slacks and a sports shirt, and asked for a copy of the *Chicago Express*.

"It don't get in until five," the man said. "And we're sold out of yesterday's."

"Then give me a copy of your local paper."

Bennett handed the man a dime.

"I always buy the *Express* when I'm near Chicago," Bennett added. "An old Army buddy of mine works for it. He's a printer. As a matter of fact, he's from right here in Baldwin. Leo Carter. You know him?"

"Sure. We're sort of distant cousins. Most everyone around here is."

"I suppose a lot of Leo's relatives buy the *Express*."

"Some do. But folks here buy the Indiana papers mostly."

A small boy, stacking magazines in a corner, looked at Bennett and said, "Bart McCollum gets the *Express* every day. Two copies. We gotta put 'em aside for him."

"Who's Bart McCollum?"

"Leo's brother-in-law," the man said. "He married Leo's sister."

"What business is he in?"

"He's a lawyer."

"Why does he buy two copies?"

"I dunno." The man frowned. "What'd you say your name was? So I can tell Leo, the next time he visits here?"

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"Walatonowski," Bennet said.

Bennett walked out and down the block to the courthouse, located on a square in the middle of town. He sat down on a bench, unfolded the local paper, and read it. The ink was still damp.

On page two Bennett noted an account of a circuit court trial under the byline "Jerry Allen." On page three "Jerry Allen" had written another story, this one a round-up of minor court cases. Jerry Allen, then, must be the local paper's courthouse reporter.

Bennett rose, walked to an outside telephone booth, and dialed the local newspaper. He asked for Jerry Allen.

"Everyone in editorial is gone," a girl said, "now that the paper is printed. But you can probably find Jerry in the Blockman Hotel bar."

Bennett hung up. Across the street was the Blockman Hotel. And, on street level, the bar.

Bennett dumped the paper into a trash can. He crossed the street and entered the bar, crowded at this hour with attorneys and other courthouse figures. Most of the talk was legal or political. Bennett asked for Jerry Allen and the bartender pointed to a tall, black-haired, broad-shouldered young man reading a newspaper.

Bennett crowded in beside the young man.

"Excuse me," Bennett said. "But you're Jerry Allen, aren't you?"

The young man grinned. "That's right." He folded the newspaper. "Just reading the competition from the next county. To see where they scooped me and I scooped them. Can I help you?"

"My name's Ted Bennett." They shook hands. Ted ordered a beer for himself and another for the reporter. "Years ago I was in the newspaper business too. For small dailies in California. But I got out of that and now I'm in public relations in South Bend. My wife and I like the country around here and we're thinking of investing in some property in Baldwin. I saw your name on those court stories and hoped it wouldn't be too much of an imposition if you'd clue me in on the good lawyers in town. When we buy our property, we'll want a local lawyer."

Agreeably, the reporter launched into a casual analysis of Baldwin's legal talent. After a while Bennett said, "The clerk at our motel mentioned a lawyer named McCollum. He was awful high on him."

"Bart McCollum? He's one of the best, but mostly he handles estates and trusts. He inherited a lot of his clients from his father. He's looking out for more widows and orphans than the welfare department."

"Is that so?"

"In fact, Bart is so busy I doubt he'd handle any real estate transaction, unless it was a mighty big deal. He'd probably refer you to one of his cousins. He's got four

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cousins practicing law here too."

"He's doing well," Bennett agreed.

"Bart has as much money as anyone I know. But if you want him to handle your case, why don't you ask him? He's right over there. He always stops at the Blockman on his way home."

The reporter pointed to a tall, ruddy, white-haired man of fifty or so, who stood in the center of a group at the end of the bar.

"I wouldn't bother him now," Bennett said. "Anyhow, you're probably right. About getting a man who specializes in real estate."

Bennett bought the reporter another beer and then left. McCollum was still holding a glass and talking politics. Bennett walked back to the news agency. The *Chicago Express* had arrived, so Bennett bought a copy, nodding to the man he'd spoken to earlier. The man said nothing.

Bennett crossed the street and climbed into his rented car. He unfolded the *Express* to the financial section and scanned the stock tables.

Sundown was in again. It had climbed a half point this time, on a volume of four hundred shares, to close at 30.

Bennett settled back to wait for McCollum. The attorney always bought two copies of the *Express*. And Bennett intended to see what McCollum did with those two copies.

McCollum arrived in twenty minutes. He purchased his two copies of the *Express* from the small boy. The man who had sold Bennett the paper was not in sight.

McCollum came back outside. Bennett let him round a corner, then Bennett pulled his car into the street and followed.

McCollum climbed into a car in the courthouse lot. Bennett almost lost McCollum while circling the courthouse, but picked him up on the main street leading out of town. McCollum's car, a black Cadillac, was easy to spot.

McCollum turned right, down a road running parallel with a weed-lined railroad track. His Cadillac disappeared around a turn.

Bennett rounded the turn a moment later. Then Bennett stomped hard on the brake pedal and swung the steering wheel in order to avoid ramming the Cadillac, which had been pulled across the road.

Bennett's car swerved and bounded into a ditch.

Bennett cut the motor. He sighed and looked up.

McCollum and Jerry Allen, the reporter, loomed on the driver's side of his car. And waiting at the other door was the man who worked at the news agency.

"Your Cadillac," Bennett said evenly, "is blocking the right-of-way."

McCollum ignored the observation. He asked, "Is Ted Bennett

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your real name? Or is it Walatonowski? Or are both of them as phoney as the rest of you?"

"It's Bennett," Ted replied. "And as for phonies—how would you like to buy a few hundred shares of Sundown Gold? I can let you have it cheap. 'Way under the price quoted in the *Chicago Express*. I have connections with the secretary of the company."

McCollum opened the door. "Get out," he ordered.

Bennett shrugged. "This is quite a conspiracy," he said. Gingerly, he climbed from the car. The news agency man walked around and joined McCollum and the reporter. "I'm beginning to think it involves everyone in Baldwin, Indiana."

"It almost does," McCollum said. "At any rate, my cousin Stan, who runs the news agency, got curious when you asked questions about me, and why I bought two copies of the *Express*. So Stan called me up and told me about you. And after you left the Blockman Hotel bar, my cousin Jerry told me about your conversation. And while Jerry and I were still at the bar, Stan called and told me you'd bought the *Chicago*. *Express* and were waiting across the street in your car. Which made it obvious you were waiting for me. And now, if you don't mind, we'd like to know what you really are. Because we don't think you're Leo's old Army buddy or a public relations man from South Bend."

"That's true," Bennett said. "I'm an investigator, engaged by the *Chicago Express* to learn why you induced Leo Carter to insert fake quotes for Sundown Gold in the *Express* stock tables. And for your information, if I don't make a telephone call to Chicago by eight o'clock, there'll be so many private detectives, state troopers, and hard-nosed big-city reporters down here by midnight that every skeleton in Baldwin's closet will be put under kleig lights. From coast to coast."

"As for your phone call," McCollum said, "we'll defer that a while. But since you've come this far, Mr. Bennett, I think we'd better take a little trip. And then—we'll see."

They went in McCollum's car. McCollum drove. Bennett sat in the back, flanked by Jerry Allen and the newspaper agency man.

They left Baldwin and headed out on a state highway into the rolling green countryside. Shadows were lengthening. Twenty miles beyond Baldwin, McCollum slowed and wheeled the car down a blacktop side road. This road, screened by brush and tall trees on both sides, turned and twisted, passing occasional farms and cottages, until it reached a small lake.

There McCollum braked and turned the engine off. He had parked before a trim, newly built lakeside home. The name on the rural mailbox meant nothing to Bennett.

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"We get out here," McCollum announced.

Bennett climbed out behind the reporter. The news agency man got out behind Bennett. McCollum led the group toward the house.

The door opened. A woman, wearing a housedress and an apron, stepped into the yard. She was tall, thin, and about thirty. She smiled and nodded to McCollum, then glanced at Bennett.

"Who's he?"

"Fella from Chicago," McCollum replied curtly. "He wants to know about Sundown Gold Mines."

The woman chewed her lower lip. She said, "There won't be any trouble, will there?"

"That depends." McCollum turned to Bennett. "Come along with me. You others, wait here."

McCollum and Bennett walked around the side of the house.

"I," McCollum said, "am going to introduce you to the owner of record of sixteen thousand, nine hundred and forty-eight shares of stock in Sundown Gold Mines. The person to whom I deliver, every day, my second copy of the *Chicago Express*. And no matter what else happens, God help you if you ever spill the beans to *this* person. Because if you so much as hint that Sundown stock is worthless, I'll personally put a bullet into your brain."

The little girl was dozing in a wheel chair in the back yard, a robe over her lap. As they came near, she blinked and looked up. Her skin was dead-white. She managed a weak smile. Whatever disease ravaged her small body, it was obvious to Bennett she did not have long to live.

"Hello, Uncle Bart," she said. The tiny voice barely reached them, although now they stood only a few feet away.

"Hello, Pat," Bart McCollum said. He smiled and kissed her forehead.

"Your *Express* is in the car, Pat." McCollum nodded to Bennett. "But first, this man has come all the way from Denver to see you. His name is Mr. Bennett. He's a Vice-president of the Sundown Gold Mines Company." McCollum looked at Bennett. "Aren't you?"

Bennett cleared his throat. "That's right," he admitted.

The little girl gazed at Bennett in awe.

"I was telling Mr. Bennett," McCollum went on, "how your cousin Leo and I sold you that Sundown stock two years ago for fifty cents. How you keep your stock certificates in a strongbox, which you have hidden somewhere here in the yard. And how you follow the progress of the stock in the financial pages of the *Express*."

Pat said to Bennett, "Sundown is the only stock I own. But I think it's the best stock in the world, don't you?"

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"I can't think of a better buy," Bennett replied shakily, "even at the current relatively high price."

"Mr. Bennett is here," McCollum continued, "because you, Pat, are now the largest single stockholder in Sundown Gold Mines. And the management thought you were entitled to a personal report on the latest corporate developments. Especially, on how Sundown has hired Marshal Dillon to cope with the Indians sniping at the miners."

"The situation *is* kind of touchy," Bennett said to Pat, "but in addition to Dillon, our capital expenditures for the coming year include provisions for a Gatling gun. And when we get *that* thing installed, I think we can hold off the whole Indian Nation."

It was nine o'clock. The city room of the *Chicago Express* was quiet. Ed Colby, the financial editor, sat stonily behind his desk. Across from him, ranged in chairs, were the managing editor, the executive editor, and Michael Dane James.

"The little girl," James explained, "is McCollum's niece. And a cousin to half the population of Baldwin. She's been an invalid since infancy. It's unlikely she'll live another year. Naturally, the whole family, and everyone else in Baldwin, has indulged her to the limit. Two years ago, while Leo Carter was visiting Baldwin, Pat was in poor spirits. So Leo and his sister—Bart's wife—dug out some blank old Sundown stock certificates they'd inherited. Leo and Bart sold them to Pat for fifty cents, on the condition Pat hold the stock as an investment and not let it out of the family. Pat got a big kick out of this. The certificates were made out in her name and looked absolutely authentic. And as time went on, Bart and the others reported to Pat on the mythical progress of Sundown stock—how it was going up and up.

"But then Pat got suspicious. The local paper doesn't carry stock tables, and she couldn't find Sundown listed on the financial pages of other newspapers. So as a one-time gag, Leo slipped a fake Sundown quote into the mid-day edition of the *Express*. The family underestimated Pat's reaction. It was the most thrilling thing that had ever happened to her. It proved the stock was real. Thereafter, she insisted on reading the *Express* every day. When the quotation didn't reappear, she was heartbroken. So Leo slipped another one in. And another. Because Pat was like any other investor now. A high point of her day was to check the stock tables for the latest quote on her stock. And that, gentlemen, is the story of Sundown Gold Mines.

"The situation got out of hand. McCollum and the others were

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worried, since they knew Leo would be fired when the fake quotations were discovered—and that they all might get into trouble for tampering with the mid-day stock tables in the *Express*. But nobody, least of all Leo, had the heart to deny the child the pleasure she got from seeing those Sundown quotes—each one a little higher than the last. Leo can operate a Lino and he set those quotes himself. And so now the question is—what are you fellows going to do about it?"

For a moment nobody said anything. Then the executive editor gazed at the ceiling. He puffed dreamily on a cigar.

"Personally," he drawled to nobody in particular, "I see no reason to discipline Carter. From what I'm told, he's one of the best printers in the shop."

"I'll have a talk with him," the managing editor said, "to let him know there are no hard feelings. Have any thoughts on this, Ed?"

The financial editor glanced briefly at the executive editor. Then he studied a Dow Jones tear sheet on his desk.

"I think," the financial editor said casually, "that since the Dow Jones industrials rose nearly four points today, we should include in tomorrow's mid-day stock tables a quote showing that Sundown Gold went up a quarter of a point on a volume of three hundred shares. Any objections?"

Nobody objected.

The financial editor smiled. He swiveled in his chair, turning his back to the group and facing an array of lights on the other side of the Chicago River.

"What's more," he went on, "it's my opinion we should carry a quote on Sundown every day. In the afternoon edition only, of course. But Sundown is a very hot issue. It's my considered judgment, in fact, that by the end of the year, Sundown will hit a hundred."

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MURDER DE LUXE

by HUGH PENTECOST

(*continued from Page 84*)

Certain areas of the search for Bobbie Cook were covered quickly and efficiently; other areas were maddeningly slow to take their place in the jigsaw puzzle. Half of the living space in the Hotel Beaumont was made up of cooperative apartments, owned by the tenants. It wasn't possible to walk in and out of these apartments by a passkey. Only some kind of emergency, such as fire, a plumbing leak, some service failure, would justify entry by a member of the hotel staff.

On the transient floors things could be handled more rapidly. The night maid could simply tap on the door with her key, and if no one answered she could let herself in, provided the door wasn't chain-locked on the inside. There was always the excuse of fresh towels, or making certain that beds had been turned down. But all of this was tragically slow.

The night engineer, Mr. McNab, and one of the bellboys dressed in coveralls began covering the co-ops from the fifteenth floor up, telling each tenant they found at home that there was a bad water leak on the floor below, and entering those apartments where they got no answer and could effect entry. But at best it was a long and tedious business.

From the first floor, which was actually above the mezzanine, to the fourteenth, every public room, broom closet, and linen storage cupboard was covered quickly by the night maids on each floor.

No result.

The subbasements, engine rooms, kitchens, pantries, refrigeration rooms, public dining rooms, bars, offices, conference rooms, locker rooms for the staff, powder rooms, Men's Rooms, smart shops in the lobby—all these were covered.

No results.

In the telephone offices on the third floor Alison stood beside the bony, grim-faced Mrs. Kiley, who was the night chief, watching the switchboard operators trying to handle the regular service and, in between, methodically calling room after room and apartment after apartment to inquire if anyone had seen Bobbie Cook.

Alison felt angry and a little sick to her stomach as she listened. An unpleasantly large percentage of the people questioned by the operators were annoyed at the interruption and angry at being asked the question. If a stray child was there, wouldn't they have reported it? Mr. Chambrun would hear about this in the morning!

There was a running fire of comment from the operators which would have amused Alison under different circumstances.

"Come on, Mrs. P. Get that bandage off your jowls and answer!"

"Now for old poop-face!"

"Here goes a year's tips from that old fanny-pincher in 906."

Alison had heard Mr. Chambrun quote figures on one occasion. Eighty per cent. of the male residents were

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cheating on their wives. Fifty per cent. of the wives were indulging themselves with outside lovers. In the telephone office there was a cynical and acid awareness of the in's and out's of hundreds of private lives. Far too many of the guests considered these telephone inquiries an outrageous intrusion, and these guests voiced their resentment and objections without a drop of pity for the missing child. Alison could hardly believe what she saw and heard.

And out of it all came only one discouraging fact: no one had seen Bobbie Cook.

At least, no one would admit having seen her . . .

Chambrun had established himself in his own office. The Cooks were with him. He had persuaded them there was nothing they could do to help the search. The presence of anyone but a member of the hotel staff in a guest's room would be questioned. The instant there was any news, Chambrun would have it here in his office.

Jerry Dodd, who knew his job, produced a moment's interest. He had routed out the room-service waiter who had served Bobbie's dinner. The man, who lived in the Bronx, had gone home at eleven. It had taken him some time to get back to the hotel.

"Edward Hutchins, who served the kid's dinner," Jerry told Chambrun.

Hutchins was trembling with anxiety. Like most innocent people he saw himself walking up the steps to the gallows to be hanged on a false charge of kidnaping.

Chambrun gave him a reassuring smile, telling him they simply wanted information about the service he'd performed.

A flood of words poured out of the perspiring waiter.

"Please. Take it easy," Chambrun said. "The little girl's parents are anxious to understand."

Hutchins had kids of his own. "She's a fine little girl," he said. "She'll be all right. You'll see."

"Tell 'em what you told me, Hutchins," Jerry said.

"I got the check in the service kitchen," he said. "Service for two."

"Two?" Chambrun said.

Hutchins nodded. "Two. Double order of everything. Two shrimp cocktails. Two filet mignon—both rare. Two baked potatoes. Two green salads. Two ice creams. One milk and one coffee."

Chambrun glanced at Anne Cook and raised an eyebrow. Anne's eyes were filled with tears.

"Her imaginary friend," she said. "It's a boy named Hilary. She and Hilary—" Anne's voice broke"—she and Hilary are going to be married. He owns a large estate in England and she's going there to live."

Chambrun nodded slowly. "So you served for two, Hutchins?"

The waiter nodded. "But only the little girl was there."

"She was all right?" Anne asked eagerly.

"She was fine," Hutchins said. "I looked around for maybe a sitter or nursemaid or some member of the family, but there was no one. I asked the little girl if I could come back for the table in an hour. She said fine. Just knock on door, she told me."

"And you came back in an hour?"

"Sure. They finished okay."

"They?"

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Hutchins shrugged. "Both dinners were finished. Both people were hungry. They cleaned up everything on the plates."

"Both dinners were completely eaten?"

"Yes. But I still didn't see any other person."

"If she ate two dinners," Chambrun said to Anne, "our hope that she may be asleep somewhere looks even better. Two filet mignons! Two baked potatoes!"

"Go on, Hutchins," Jerry said. The Beaumont's house officer still had something up his sleeve.

"You don't blame me for being curious, Mr. Chambrun?" The waiter asked hesitantly.

"I approve of it," Chambrun said drily.

"I was interested in the person I didn't see," Hutchins said. "And I found out one thing. It was a grown-up."

"How did you figure that out?"

"Ashtray!" Hutchins said, beaming at Chambrun.

"What about the ashtray?"

"On my table. Five, six butts."

"Smoked cigarette stubs?"

"Yes, butts, and smoked right down to the end."

"Of course you didn't save them?"

"Why?" Hutchins spread his hands.

Chambrun turned to look at Anne. "Does Hilary smoke?" His voice was tinged with humor.

"I don't know," Anne said.

"Plain or filter tip, Hutchins?" Chambrun asked.

"Filter. Smoked right down. Brown filter—like Winstons."

Chambrun looked at the Cooks again. They appeared oddly disturbed. "What brands do you smoke?" he asked.

Anne moistened her lips. "Neither of us smokes cigarettes," she said. "Cliff smokes a pipe occasionally."

"Did you have any guests in the suite who might have left a pack around?" Chambrun asked.

"No. There's been no one in our rooms at all, Mr. Chambrun—except the maids, the room-service waiters, and a bellboy once or twice."

"Could Bobbie have bought the cigarettes for—for Hilary?"

"An eight-year-old child!" Cook said.

"You're wondering if we'd sell them to her downstairs? I think so. The girl at the counter would assume she was buying them for her parents. Besides, there are cigarette machines all over the place."

"You think an eight-year-old child smoked six cigarettes right down to the filter?" Jerry asked. "And ate two man-sized dinners?"

Chambrun didn't answer, but he was frowning. "When did you serve the dinner, Hutchins?"

"Maybe a quarter to eight. The slip will show," the waiter said. "I picked up the table just after nine. I know because the little girl opened door for me and then ran back to the TV set. I recognized the show that was on."

"And you never saw a sign of anyone but the child?"

"Sign? Two dinners were gone. Wasn't that a sign? Cigarettes were smoked. Wasn't that a sign?"

"But nothing else? No hat? No coat? No handbag?"

"I didn't look," Hutchins said. "I didn't know anything was wrong then."

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Chambrun was silent for a moment. "Thank you, Hutchins. Stop at the cashier's window tomorrow. There'll be a bonus for you for your trouble."

The waiter bowed his pleasure and started out.

"Please," Anne said. "She looked all right? She looked happy that second time?"

"She looked fine, lady. She didn't pay much attention to me because of the TV, but she was fine then."

Chambrun broke a short silence after the waiter had gone. "Do you think she was experimenting with cigarettes, Mrs. Cook?"

"I've never known her to," Anne said.

"But this was a special evening—and a special party for her—and Hilary."

"She's always pretending, always pretending to be someone else. It's possible."

"How much has she been around the hotel by herself?" Chambrun asked.

"Around the hotel?"

"Has she been down in the lobby by herself to buy you a newspaper? To the drug store for a soda? To the toy store for a present?"

"She's been down a few times on errands for me," Anne said. "Mostly I invented the errands because she liked to ride the elevator and watch people in the lobby and look at things in the shop windows."

"The point I'm trying to make," Chambrun said, "is that she could have met somebody in the lobby. Would she speak to a stranger freely?"

"She'd talk to anyone who'd even smile at her," Cook said.

"Then it's possible she made a new friend and asked him—or her—up to 7H without mentioning it to you. Part of her big evening."

"It's not like her," Anne said. "It's not like her to keep that kind of secret from me. But I suppose it's possible. Why, though, would the person hide from the waiter?"

The answer to that, Chambrun thought, was unpleasantly obvious.

"If the person made friends with Bobbie for the eventual purpose of taking her away, he'd hide from the waiter," Chambrun said. "And he'd learn from Bobbie the whole scheme of the evening. He'd stay in 7H until Miss Hillhouse made her last call at ten thirty. He then had half an hour in which to persuade Bobbie to go somewhere with him—or to force her to go."

"You buy that?" Jerry Dodd asked. "Because I do."

Chambrun said grimly, "So where does it get you, chum? Any idea who we're looking for?"

Jerry's jaw jutted out stubbornly. "No, but if she was chit-chatting with someone in the lobby it may have been noticed."

"By the day staff," Chambrun said. "What chance do we have of digging that out before morning?"

After Jerry went off to phone some of the day staff at their homes, Chambrun decided to take a personal hand in one part of the search. He left the protesting Cooks in his office and went to the eighth floor when a phone report indicated that floor was about to be covered.

Number 8B, a three-room suite, was occupied by Martin Hobbs. George Webber was in 803, Don

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Stanton in 805, Miss Garth in 807.

A phone call to the Blue Lagoon from the housekeeper's cubbyhole on Eight reassured Chambrun that Hobbs, Webber, Stanton, and Miss Garth were still whooping it up at their table there.

Accompanied by the frightened night maid and Johnny Thacker, the night bell-captain, Chambrun entered Martin Hobbs's suite with a passkey.

Hobbs's suite was neat as a pin. A reasonably elaborate wardrobe of suits and evening clothes hung in the closet. Expensive luggage was stacked on the upper shelves. Apparently no business papers of any sort were kept here. The bathroom had the usual equipment of razor, shaving cream, tooth brush and paste, hair tonic, comb, and brushes.

Chambrun idly opened the lid of the disposal unit. The Beaumont provided a miniature trash drop in every bathroom for old razor blades, used tissues, empty medicine bottles, and the like. The disposal unit was empty in Hobbs's bathroom.

There was absolutely nothing in the room to indicate that Bobbie Cook had ever been there in her life.

Miss Garth's room was not so neat. She had dressed hurriedly for the evening. But there were no signs of the missing child. Chambrun puzzled the maid and Johnny Thacker by spending some time examining and sniffing at half a dozen jars and bottles of creams and lotions on Miss Garth's dressing table. Eventually he went over to the phone and called Carl Nevers on the lobby desk.

"Do the Hobbs party keep anything in the safe down there, Carl?" he asked.

"Several attaché cases of business papers," Nevers said. "The secretary leaves them here at the end of the day and picks them up in the morning."

That explained the absence of any notes or papers.

Don Stanton's room was negative.

Webber's room was negative—or almost negative. In the disposal unit in his bathroom Chambrun found a small, black screw-top from some sort of bottle that had stuck in the unit.

Chambrun took it out, sniffed it, tossed it up in the air, and caught it. He started to drop it back in the chute, then changed his mind and dropped it in his coat pocket.

Chambrun hadn't really expected to find anything incriminating in these rooms—he just wanted to make certain.

A man's cracking point in a crisis is unpredictable. He may carry through until it's all over and then break apart. It may happen anywhere along the way. Cliff Cook's smashup came about fifteen minutes after Chambrun had left him and Anne in the manager's office, suffering together in a tortured silence.

"They're not going to find her," Cook said suddenly to his wife. "Hobbs got her out of the hotel somehow."

Anne, doubled over as if she was suffering from cramps, shook her head. "We've got to keep hoping, Cliff—until we know for sure."

"I know for sure," Cook said. "Our one chance to get Bobbie back is for me to act before it's too late for them to be able to return her. I'll make the deal they want. I'll make any deal."

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"Cliff!"

He'd already started for the office door. "Chambrun's doing his best," he said, "but it isn't going to be enough to find Bobbie. They're too clever for that. They have the money to bribe the whole hotel staff, if necessary."

"I'm coming with you," Anne said.

"No. You stay here, Anne, just in case there is any word. Take it easy, darling. They want what I have to give just as badly as we want Bobbie."

A man under less pressure, with the capacity to think coolly about his problem, would not have followed Cliff Cook's course. But Cook was thinking in a red haze of rage and terror. He would make his deal; he would get Bobbie back and he would sell his patents to Hobbs. But then, by God, he would spend the rest of his life making sure they were punished. He wasn't thinking of any kind of delicate approach. They would make the deal on the top of the table—no double talk, no pretenses. A cold, open-and-shut deal.

Mr. Cardoza, the captain of the Blue Lagoon Room, saw Cook approaching the red velvet rope stretched across the entrance to the Beaumont's night club. Mr. Cardoza didn't know who Cook was, but he knew trouble when he saw it. Mr. Cardoza could feel the small hairs rising on the back of his neck.

Handling belligerent drunks was an old story to Cardoza—but the look of cold, sober fury on Cook's face was something else again. Cardoza stepped outside the velvet rope and stood there, blocking Cook's way, his suave professional smile nicely in place.

"I'm sorry, sir," Cardoza said, "but there are no vacancies tonight."

"I don't want a table," Cook said, looking past Cardoza into the supper room. He saw the large circular table where Hobbs, Webber, Stanton, Miss Garth, and half a dozen others were apparently enjoying themselves. Every last ounce of color left Cook's face.

Cardoza, smiling and smiling, made a half-hidden gesture to one of his assistants inside the velvet rope.

"I want to talk to Mr. Hobbs," Cook said.

"I'll ask him if he cares to come out to talk to you," Cardoza said smoothly.

"I'm going in," Cook said.

Cardoza snapped his fingers and suddenly there were four white-tied waiters standing behind him. "I'll ask Mr. Hobbs if he cares to come out, sir. May I have your name?"

"Clifford Cook. Oh, he knows me."

Cardoza stepped inside the velvet rope and threaded his way through the crowded tables to the one occupied by Martin Hobbs. He bent down and whispered in the promoter's ear. "There's a gentlemen at the entrance, Mr. Hobbs. He wants to see you. His name is Clifford Cook."

"Cook!" Hobbs's voice was sharp, his face slightly flushed from drinking. Webber, sitting two or three places away, was motionlessly attentive.

"It's none of my affair, sir," Cardoza said softly, "but he seems in a highly disturbed state."

Hobbs looked down the table at Webber, whose head moved in an almost imperceptible nod.

"Tell Mr. Cook we'll be happy to have him join us, Captain."

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"Whatever you say, Mr. Hobbs."

Cardoza moved back toward the entrance. Halfway there he made a gesture to his corps of waiters and they made way for Cook, who came striding down the room, his eyes fixed on Hobbs.

The young financier rose from his chair as Cook reached the table. He held out his hand in a cordial gesture of greeting. "This is a pleasant surprise, Cliff. Here, take my chair. I'll get another one."

"I'm not sitting down," Cook said. His voice was shaking. Hobbs's smiling face was almost too much for him. "I've come to tell you that if my daughter is safely returned to me—*at once*—I'll sign whatever contract you want me to." The words were clear and loud. Everyone at the table heard them.

"My dear fellow!" Hobbs said.

Webber had risen quickly and was coming around the table to them. "What's this about your daughter?"

"There's no reason to go into details," Cook said, fighting for shreds of control. "You know them as well as I do. Return Bobbie and I'll do whatever you want me to."

A dozen faces in the area of the three standing men were turned their way. Webber put his hand on Cook's arm. Cook shook it off with a kind of frightening violence.

"You're not yourself, Cook. We'd better talk about this somewhere else," Webber said. "This way."

He turned his back on Cook and headed toward the Men's Room in the far corner of the Blue Lagoon. It threw Cook off balance, and after a moment's hesitation he followed. Hobbs turned to his guests and gave them a broad wink.

"Stoned to the gills," he said. "Excuse us for a moment." He moved quickly off in Cook's wake.

Webber went straight into the Men's Room without looking back. The attendant, an elderly Sicilian, smiled and began to run hot water into one of the wash basins. Webber took a money clip from his pocket and extracted a ten-dollar bill from it. He handed it to the old man.

"Just go outside the door and don't let anyone in for a few minutes," Webber said.

"I not supposed to leave—"

"I'm making it nice, Dad," Webber said. "If you don't want it nice—"

For ten dollars the old man went out, brushing against Cliff Cook who was coming in. For ten dollars the old man watched Martin Hobbs follow Cook in. Then the old man went rapidly in search of Mr. Cardoza. For ten dollars! Not for ten dollars or a million dollars would Tony Gardella leave his post. But Webber was much too tough a customer for old Tony to handle alone.

Webber was washing his hands in the basin, bent forward, but his eyes were on the mirror which reflected the images of a chalk-white Cliff Cook and a visibly alarmed Martin Hobbs.

"What's all this about your kid?" Webber asked, sampling the powdered soap.

"So it's private here," Cook said, almost strangling on the words. "You know what I'm talking about, both of you. Bobbie's gone. She was taken out of our suite while we were at the theater. You took her—or you had her taken."

"My dear Cliff!" Hobbs protested.

"You're accusing us of kidnaping," Webber said, reaching for one of the

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small handtowels on the glass shelf in front of him. "You accused us of it in front of a dozen people out there." His tone was conversational.

"Just bring Bobbie back and I'll sign your contract," Cook said.

Webber turned, discarding the towel in a wicker basket to the left of the basin. He was smiling. The white-tiled room glittered with a kind of hospital brightness.

"Maybe it's better we didn't do any business with you," Webber said. "You're an irresponsible hysteric. Do you think people in our position would run that kind of crazy risk just to get your stinking motor?"

"I don't want to talk. I just want action!" Cook said.

"Oh?" A slow, unpleasant smile moved Webber's mouth. "You just want action, is that it?"

Then his foot shot out to give Cook an agonizing kick in the shin. As Cook doubled forward with a cry of pain. Webber ripped a right to the jaw that sent Cook rolling and sliding away on the tile floor.

"George!" Hobbs cried.

"Shut up, Martin," Webber said. "He made a public accusation against us. It's time he was taught a lesson."

Cook was struggling up, a trickle of blood running from the corner of his mouth. His eyes looked glazed. Webber took a step forward and yanked Cook to his feet, his left hand closed on the front of Cook's jacket. Then he punched—piledriving blows to the stomach and again to the jaw. Cook, flailing futilely with his arms, somehow wrenched away from Webber but fell again, hard, on the glistening tile floor. There were spots of bright scarlet on the white tiles now.

Webber, who had moved with a kind of machinelike precision up to now, seemed suddenly to explode. He sprang on the fallen Cook, pulled him to his knees, kicked him, and then with Cook's face at belt-buckle level he smashed at Cook's nose and mouth, savagely, brutally. The nose flattened out to one side. The mouth was a bloody pulp.

"George!" Hobbs cried. "For God's sake!"

The door to the washroom burst open and Mr. Cardoza, followed by old Tony Gardella and three waiters came in. Webber, his fist drawn back for another blow, turned his head quite calmly to look at Cardoza. Then he struck once more into the middle of that drooling mass of agony. He let go of Cook's jacket and the limp Cook fell to the floor like a sack of grain.

Cardoza spat out a single word.

Webber turned quietly to the wash basin again. He frowned at himself in the mirror. There were several bright red spots on his white shirt front. He moistened the end of a towel and calmly began to work on the spots.

"Get Dr. Partridge," Cardoza said sharply.

One of the waiters ran out.

"Before you call the police," Webber said in that cold, conversational tone, "you'd better ask Mr. Cook if he wants to prefer charges. He accused us publicly of kidnaping his child. I thought this would be more fun than suing him for every cent he has in the world. The stupid son of a—" Then he looked at Hobbs and laughed. "Shall we join the ladies, Martin?"

Half an hour later an ambulance took Clifford Cook to the hospital.

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Dr. Partridge had diagnosed a broken jaw, broken nose, a severe concussion if not a possible skull fracture. Anne Cook, on the horns of two horrors, had ridden to the hospital with Cook on a promise from Chambrun that he and the police would continue the search for Bobbie and that the sympathetic Alison would stay in constant touch with Anne at the hospital.

Chambrun and Alison walked back into the lobby from the side entrance when the ambulance left. Alison was shocked by what had happened. Chambrun was in the grip of an icy anger. Cardoza had reported George Webber's words to them.

"Could they sue Mr. Cook for making a public accusation?" Alison asked.

"They could try. They'd have to prove that somebody believed it and that they were damaged by it."

"You believe it, don't you?"

"I believe it," Chambrun said. They had paused in front of one of the darkened store windows in the lobby. "The problem is that the child's life is still in the balance, Alison. I tried to keep Cook out of just such a situation because now he's made it harder, if not impossible, for them to return her."

"You think they got Bobbie out of the hotel between Miss Hillhouse's last call at ten thirty and eleven, when she arrived at 7H?"

Chambrun didn't answer. He was looking thoughtfully in the store window. It was a gift and toy shop. There was a display of animals, including all the characters from *Winnie the Pooh*. There was a beautiful French doll, lying in a satin-lined box, her eyes closed. There were circus clowns and cowboys, and large stuffed tigers.

"Mr. Chambrun?"

He turned to Alison and his usually hooded eyes were wide open with an excited brightness Alison had never seen in them.

"Wait here, Alison," he said. He walked across to one of the lobby phones, spoke for a minute, and then rejoined her. "Come with me," he said.

He led the way to the bank of elevators. "Fourteen," he told the operator and they were whisked upward.

"What's on fourteen?" Alison asked.

"A missing child, I hope," Chambrun said.

"Mr. Chambrun!"

They got out at the fourteenth floor.

"I phoned Jerry Dodd to meet us here," Chambrun said. "He was still calling members of the day staff from the telephone office." As he spoke another elevator door opened and Jerry Dodd joined them.

"What's cooking, Chief?"

Chambrun didn't answer. He walked down the corridor to the door of 14B with Alison and Jerry at his heels. He knocked briskly on the door.

There was a long wait and then a muffled woman's voice spoke from the other side of the door. "What is it?"

"I'm the resident manager, Miss Thomas," Chambrun said. "I've come to get Bobbie Cook."

"Holy cow!" Jerry Dodd whispered.

Alison's cold fingers closed on Chambrun's wrist. He stood perfectly still. She wondered if he was breathing. Then, very slowly, the door opened and Miss Laura Thomas faced

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them, her glasses black circles in a dead-white face with a scarlet gash for a mouth.

"Her parents have come home?" Miss Thomas asked in a perfectly casual voice.

"Her parents have come home," Chambrun said. "Where is the child?"

"In the bedroom," Miss Thomas said, standing aside.

Chambrun walked quickly through the living room to the bedroom door. Stretched out on the bed, covered by a soft blanket, was Bobbie Cook, surrounded by a collection of dolls and toys. She was sleeping peacefully.

A nerve twitched in Chambrun's cheek and he let out his breath in a long sigh. He turned back into the living room and there was a noticeable dampness on his forehead.

"If they'd called me I'd have brought her down," Miss Thomas said blandly.

"How could they call you?"

"Why, the note!" Miss Thomas said. "The note Bobbie left for them."

Chambrun's silver cigarette case snapped open. He took out one of his Egyptian cigarettes and slowly lit it. "There was no note, Miss Thomas."

"But she left it there—on the table by the door!"

"There was no note, Miss Thomas."

"It must have fallen on the floor—under a chair, or blown away or something," Miss Thomas said. "Oh, dear, I hope they weren't too worried."

"They were worried, Miss Thomas," Chambrun said coldly. "Suppose you tell us exactly what happened tonight."

"Why, I met Bobbie in the drug store this afternoon," Miss Thomas said. "She was having an ice cream soda. I'm very fond of children. We struck up a conversation. She told me she was going to have a private party for—for imaginary friends tonight while her parents were at the theater. She asked me to come. I—well, it seemed like a charming idea."

"So you went, without discussing it with Mr. and Mrs. Cook?"

"She wanted to keep it a secret," Miss Thomas said. "You know how children are. And besides, Mr. Chambrun, I'm doing my level best to avoid publicity, as Miss Barnwell knows."

Alison, still in something of a daze, thought that if Miss Thomas *wasn't* an actress she was wasting her talents.

"So each time room service came to 7H you hid," Chambrun said.

"Of course I didn't hide!" Miss Thomas said, sounding genuinely indignant. "By the purest coincidence I happened to be in the bathroom each time, freshening up."

"Ah, yes, by the purest coincidence. And then, after ten thirty, you brought Bobbie up here—by way of the fire stairs. Why? Why not the public elevator, Miss Thomas?"

It came out smooth as oil. "You may think it curious, Mr. Chambrun, but at my age I still like to play with dolls. I have a rather unusual collection and I always carry some of them with me when I travel. I thought it would amuse Bobbie to see them."

"And the fire stairs—seven flights of them?"

"She thought it would be fun."

"And it didn't occur to you to notify the baby sitter that you were bringing Bobbie up here?"

Miss Thomas looked at Chambrun as though he wasn't quite bright.

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"There was the note," she said.

"Ah, yes, the note. The note now mysteriously missing. So after Bobbie had seen the dolls you just kept her here?"

"Naturally I thought Mrs. Cook would call when she got in. We didn't expect them till three or later. The child wanted company, but she was tired and fell asleep. So I've just been waiting."

Chambrun nodded slowly. "Let's wake her and see how things check," he said.

He turned abruptly and went back into the bedroom. He put his hand gently on Bobbie's shoulder. "All right, baby," he said.

She stirred, opened her eyes, looked up at him, was puzzled for a moment, and then she gave him a sleepy smile.

"Hello, Mr. Chambrun." She looked past him to the door where Miss Thomas, Alison, and Jerry Dodd were watching. "Gee whiz, Laura, I must have gone to sleep."

"You did, darling," Miss Thomas said. "Something happened to the note we left and your mother's been worried about you."

"Gee, Mum will kill me!" Bobbie said. "I thought maybe we should have called Miss Hillhouse."

"You had fun tonight?" Chambrun asked.

"It was cool!" Bobbie said. She sat up. "Oh, dear, I hate to leave you, Mignonette." She picked up a small doll from the pillow. "Isn't she terrif, Mr. Chambrun?" She tilted the doll forward and it made a small wailing noise and real tears came out of its eyes.

"You can have Mignonette if you like, Bobbie," Miss Thomas said.

"Oh, gee, Laura, really, truly?"

Chambrun gave Miss Thomas a look of frank admiration. "You know, Miss Thomas, it may actually stick," he said.

"Stick?" Miss Thomas asked coolly.

"Your story," Chambrun said. "It's a beaut!"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean. I've told you exactly what happened. Bobbie will tell you the same."

"I'm sure she will," Chambrun said. "Magnificent—nothing short of magnificent."

"There's one thing I don't quite understand, Mr. Chambrun," Miss Thomas said. "If you didn't find the note how did you happen to come here looking for Bobbie?"

Chambrun chuckled. "I know. That must be puzzling you no end, Miss Thomas. It shows how the best laid plans of mice—and all that. You see, we'd already spotted you for a phony, Miss Thomas. Please don't look outraged. It doesn't become you, and you haven't overdone a single thing so far. As I say, we spotted you and we were interested. The bellboy who brought you up here yesterday reported you had something live in one of your suitcases. We've tried very hard to find out what it was, without breaking and entering.

"Then, a few minutes ago, I happened to be looking in a toy store window downstairs. I was reminded that when certain toys, especially dolls, are tilted one way or another they make wailing or whining noises. That made me think of you, Miss Thomas. It might explain what the bellboy heard. But what would a grown movie star be doing with dolls? It suddenly occurred to me that dolls might be used to entertain

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a little girl who was not where she was supposed to be.

"Now don't protest, Miss Thomas. I've already told you I think your story may stick. You're just unlucky and I'm lucky. I played a hunch and it turned out to be a bull's-eye." He turned to the child. "All right, Bobbie. Thank Miss Thomas for your lovely evening, and then we have somewhere to go."

He walked through into the living room, beckoning to Alison. "Will you phone the hospital, Alison, and put Mrs. Cook out of her misery?"

"Of course."

"Then take Bobbie over there. Explain to her on the way what's happened to her father."

"Yes, Mr. Chambrun—but I still don't get in. Do you think she was really working for Hobbs?"

"Up to her ears," Chambrun said drily. "Cook was supposed to do just what he did to get Bobbie back—offer to sign the contract. Then it would turn out that Bobbie was all right—nothing wrong except that the 'note' got lost—the note which Miss Thomas palmed after Bobbie had written it. But Cook wasn't supposed to accuse them publicly of kidnaping. After that they couldn't go through with it as planned, and Webber took out his anger and frustration on poor Cook."

"So they get away with the whole thing! Alison said, indignant.

"Maybe not," Chambrun said. "Not if my luck holds."

At a quarter past three in the morning, Chambrun, Jerry Dodd, and Lieutenant Hardy of Homicide knocked on the door of Room 803. It was opened promptly by George Webber. He had clearly expected someone else. He had taken off his dinner jacket, but he was still wearing the trousers, dress shirt, with a plaid cummerbund and a matching tie.

"Oh, it's you, Chambrun," he said. He glanced curiously at Lieutenant Hardy.

"May we come in?" Chambrun asked.

"Sure," Webber said.

"You know Jerry Dodd, our house security officer? And this is Lieutenant Hardy of the New York police." Chambrun didn't mention Homicide.

"I know you want to talk about that row downstairs," Webber said. His smile was cold. "I lost my head, I guess. That damn fool Cook walked up to our table in the Blue Lagoon and in front of a dozen people accused us of kidnaping his child. I blew my top. But it surprises me that Cook would make it a police matter. He knows I can wipe him out with a defamation suit."

"Mr. Cook hasn't made an issue of it," Chambrun said. He had taken a small, black bottle-top from his pocket and now he tossed it up and caught it, over and over, as he talked. *"I'm* making the issue, Mr. Webber. We don't like violence in the Hotel Beaumont."

Webber shrugged. "If there are damages you can bill me for them."

Chambrun continued to toss the black top up and down. "The kidnaping charge by Mr. Cook was unfortunate, Mr. Webber. The little girl has been found and is safely back with her parents."

Webber's eyes suddenly had the dead, cold look of tiny ice cubes, opaque, unreadable. Chambrun tossed the bottle top up and down, up and down.

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"You're not interested in knowing where the little girl was found, Mr. Webber?" Chambrun asked.

"I couldn't care less," Webber said. "For Mrs. Cook's sake I'm glad she's safe. So just what is it you want of me, Mr. Chambrun?"

"I'm losing my touch," Chambrun said with a wry smile. "I wanted you to ask me what I'm playing with." He held up the bottle top.

"All right, Mr. Bones," Webber said, "what is it?"

"It is the cap from a medicine bottle which I found in the disposal unit in your bathroom."

"What of it?"

Chambrun held the top to his nose and sniffed gently. "I suggest it is the top from a bottle which contained a solution of strychnine which was poured into a drink in Room 1208 last night, resulting in the untimely death of Mr. Paul Fisher, a private detective who was investigating the affairs of the Martin Hobbs Enterprises."

Lids narrowed over the ice-cube eyes. "You're kidding," Webber said. "I heard about this man's death, but I had no idea it had any connection with us."

Chambrun sniffed the bottle top and made a wry face. "Oh, yes. He'd been hired to try to prove there was something fishy about your contracts with the government. Perhaps that you didn't have certain patents of Mr. Cook's which you had represented yourselves as owning? You can see why Lieutenant Hardy is interested in this cap from a bottle that may have contained strychnine and why it should have found its way into your disposal unit.

"It's bad luck for you, Mr. Webber. Whatever we may have suspected, we couldn't have proved a thing but for the unlucky chance that this cap didn't go down the chute along with the bottle. What happened? Did Fisher get the goods on you and then try to blackmail you? That's about the only thing that fits the picture of his being willing to have a drink with you."

Chambrun sniffed the bottle cap and continued. "I can visualize you making a deal, agreeing to the blackmail, and then having a drink on it. You make the drinks. Bottoms up! It would have to be bottoms up, wouldn't it, Mr. Webber, because strychnine has an extraordinarily bitter taste."

Chambrun sniffed the bottle cap again.

Webber turned and moved slowly over toward the bureau. Sometimes iron control is more of a giveaway than hysterical protestations. Slowly Webber opened the top bureau drawer and started to reach into it.

"Just leave it where it is, Webber," Hardy said sharply.

Webber jerked around to find himself facing Hardy's drawn police special.

"Get it, Jerry," Hardy said.

Jerry Dodd went over to the bureau, reached in the drawer, and brought out a compact, black automatic.

Not a muscle moved in Webber's face and when he spoke it was in a cold, matter-of-fact voice. "The whole thing has been a big gamble," he said. "We had to take it because the stakes were colossal. I had the pleasure of seeing that damn blackmailer die in agony. Half a million bucks he wanted and he thought I would fall for it. I only wish I'd had the chance to pour one for Senator Farrand. You're

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right, the taste is bitter and it contracts the spinal cord like a steel spring. It's absolute torture for a moment. Yes, I sure wish the Senator could have felt it too."

Chamburn sniffed the bottle top again. "You've forgotten one thing about strychnine, Mr. Webber. It's odorless." He tossed the black top into a waste basket by the bureau. "That was from a mouth wash bottle you evidently discarded."

Webber's face was a stone mask as Hardy snapped on the handcuffs.

Chambrun drew a deep breath. "Like you, I gambled—with the bottle top. Gambled with it because the stakes were, as you said, colossal. Human lives. They're not toys, Webber—never forget it."

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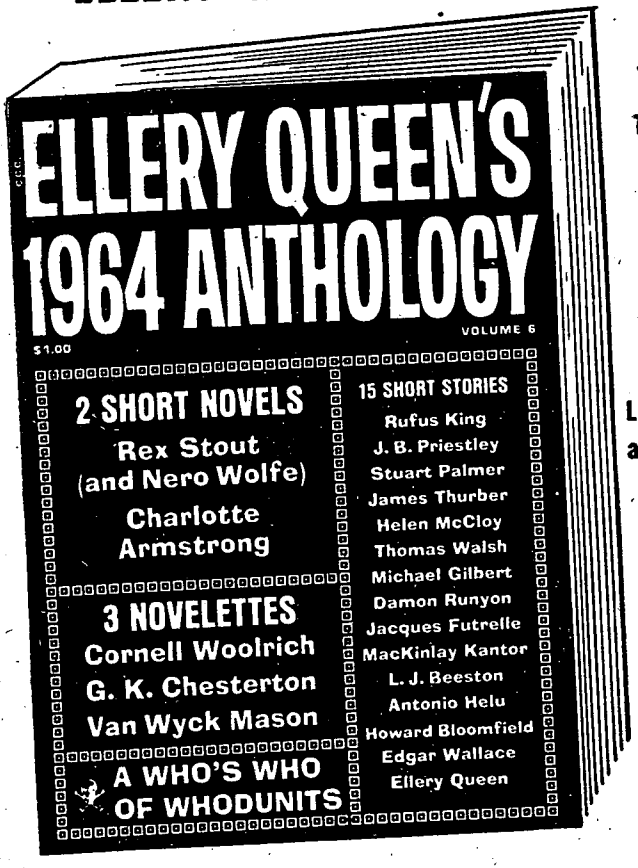

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Julian Symons recently bracketed as major "post-Ambler thriller writers" Ian Fleming, William Haggard and Len Deighton. Deighton's U.S. debut comes in November; but this month you may contrast the latest novels of the other two: Fleming's ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE, (New American Library, $4.50) and Haggard's THE HIGH WIRE (Washburn, $3.50). Personal prophecy: the subtly trenchant Haggard will still be read when the now-modish Fleming is as dead as J. S. Fletcher or Fergus Hume.

★★★★ **THE MAKE-BELIEVE MAN, *by Elizabeth Fenwick*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

What it feels like to realize that an irresponsible neurotic (and probably worse) has stolen the key to your house—beautifully modulated exercise in Fremlin-like domestic terror.

★★★ **ZEN THERE WAS MURDER, *by H. R. F. Keating*** (Penguin 1965, 85¢)

First U.S. publication by notably witty, adroit and individual British author, who plays noble games with murder in a Zen course.

★★★ **DEATH IN COVERT, *by Colin Willock*** (Penguin 1934, 65¢)

Another author new to these shores, and highly welcome, with a firm whodunit rich in fascinating details of shooting gamebirds.

★★★ **DEATH IN HIGH PROVENCE, *by George Bellairs*** (Penguin 1771, 65¢)

One of the best cases of old pro Chief Inspector Littlejohn, happily ornamented with a fine sense of French food, wine and culture.

★★★ **WHICH THE JUSTICE, WHICH THE THIEF, *by William Harrington***
(Bobbs-Merrill, $4.50)

Hardly mystery or suspense, but a persuasive transcript of a fictional robbery trial, strongly recommended as a corrective to the weird notions of American justice propagated by television and some novels.

I can hardly review the 18th annual BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (Dutton, $3.95) because this time I edited it; but I can tell you that it contains 16 stories, including 4 from EQMM and a long novelet by EQ himself, plus a yearbook of bibliography, awards, obits and an honor roll of 1962's outstanding short stories. I hope you enjoy it.

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magic names, magic titles, magic stories . . .

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a new story by

HOLLY ROTH

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**HOLLY ROTH**
TITLE:	***A Sense of Dynasty***
TYPE:	Crime and Detection
LOCALES:	French Riviera and Pennsylvania
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*It really happened in 1947 when those who could, flocked to the Riviera—the older ones to repair their war-torn lives, and the young to find the gaiety they'd been cheated of . . . a distinguished story.*

THE CABDRIVER SAID, "THERE Y'-are." He looked at me with curiosity.

I got out, paid him, walked up the two steps, opened the door, and paused. I was still trying to get my breath, control the terrible thumping inside me. Also, I was confused by the look of the place. The sign outside said, "Police Station," but I had never seen anything less like one. It came to me, however, that I never *had* seen the interior of a police station; my ideas had been formed by the world of fiction. Maybe in reality all police stations looked like this small bare room with its one table and few straight chairs.

The single person in the room was elderly, bespectacled, shirt-sleeved. He was sitting at the table, reading a newspaper. He lowered the newspaper, lowered the eyeglasses by a deft contraction of his nose, and raised his eyebrows. All three motions were fractional—admirably energy-saving, if I had been in the mood to admire.

I accepted the raised eyebrows as a question and replied to them, "I want to report a murder. I think. A something." My state of shock was great, but an awareness filtered through that my phraseology was not very convincing.

The man—a cop, I supposed—said, "Body?"

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"No. That is—no. There never was one. Not exactly. I mean, if you'll let me—"

"We don't usually have murders without bodies. Not in this town. But then, we don't usually have murders. Come to think of it, never have had. But we're very small. Still growing."

"This is not funny."

"Have I laughed? Your name?"

I opened my mouth to protest the waste of time and then realized that we had finally got down to a recognized formula. I welcomed normality. "William Dentelle." He raised the eyebrows and I spelled it.

He took a big black-covered book out of the table drawer and by sliding down on his spine, found a ballpoint pen in the drawer's extreme rear. He opened the book toward its middle and wrote down my name. His handwriting was flowing, more outgoing than the man himself seemed.

"Age?"

"Forty."

"Business?"

"I am a salesman employed by the Simpson-Bluet Manufacturing Company."

"They make heavy machinery? Largely mining machinery?

I nodded.

"Here to see the people at the mining works, huh?"

I nodded.

"Staying at the Benntown Hotel?"

There was no place else. I nodded.

"Arrived when?"

"This afternoon. Five o'clock. My appointment at the works is for eight tomorrow morning."

"The five twelve from Pittsburgh." It wasn't a question. "So you've been here two hours and you're a witness to a murder."

"I didn't say that."

"No, you didn't. Didn't say much. Want to start somewhere? I mean, like telling me who's dead?"

"Well, of course. But—it was fifteen years ago."

He put down his pen, took off the drooping eyeglasses, folded the newspaper, and leaned forward to rest on his folded arms. I noticed then that a uniform jacket was hanging on the chair behind him. He was a captain. He said, "So you don't want me to rush anywhere? We—you and I—are not going off with a clatter of hooves to see justice done?"

"Yes, I think we should do just that. But I'll have to explain."

He looked at me for quite a long time—perhaps a minute, but it seemed like a long time. He had clear brown eyes, exceptionally clear for his age, which was probably more than the sixty or so I had estimated at first. He also had all his hair, a nice cap of heavy whiteness. It occurred to me that he spoke with no trace of the accent of the region, although the

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residents of small hamlets in that corner of Pennsylvania were often almost incomprehensible.

He said, "I am the Chief of Police of this town. It is my duty to see that—ah—justice is done. One way to do my job properly is to save my energy by not wasting it on nuts. I don't apologize for my choice of words, because I haven't called you a nut—yet. Truth is, you don't look like one, but you sure sound like one. Other hand, the Simpson-Bluet people probably don't employ nuts. Usually. Got anything to prove that you are William Dentelle, and that William Dentelle is employed by Simpson-Bluet?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "Sure."

I began disgorging more papers than I had realized I carried: driver's license, business cards, a hospitalization card that had been in an inner flap of my wallet for at least five years, a Social Security card from beneath it. Two credit cards. I looked up at him, but he showed no signs of surfeit. So I produced three letters from my jacket's inner pocket. They were all addressed to me at Simpson-Bluet; they all had to do with business orders.

I stopped.

He went through each item with care, returning them one at a time. He checked the driver's license, flicking glances at me as he read "color of eyes, height, and date of birth." He reopened the black book and entered my home address in it. He then gave each of the business letters his careful attention, and returned them.

He said, "All right, Mr. Dentelle. I've had my dinner. You want to tell me a story, is that it?"

"That's it exactly," I said gratefully. "It's long and it's confused and if you'll just—"

"Tell it any way you please." The eyes were very clear, not difficult to talk into.

When the war was over, I—like lots of GI's—felt the time had come to make up for lost years. I still had two years to spend at Carnegie Tech before I would get my mining engineer's degree, and I had every intention of completing the course. And it would be easier, what with the GI Bill. My parents were quite well-to-do, but I was twenty-four and it was nice to know that I wouldn't have to lean too heavily on them.

But first . . . There was that mustering-out pay and, I figured, a vacation coming to me—two weeks per annum for almost six years, four years of war, two of Occupation. Say, three round months. "Where," asked William Dentelle of William Dentelle, "is the juiciest, ripest, to-say-nothing-of-gayest vacation spot in the world?"

William Dentelle answered himself and ended up on the French Riviera.

Cannes. In April, 1947. I was

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twenty-four. And I had company, lots of company. The place was teeming with GI's who had figured it out the same way I had. And there were girls—French girls, English girls, even American girls. Of the people of middle years, there were few; they were repairing their lives. But those of the old who could possibly afford it came to the sun to mend their tired bones and souls, and the young, whether they could afford it or not, came to find the gaiety they had been cheated of. "Affording it" wasn't too difficult. The beautiful beach-front avenue—le Boulevard de la Croisette—had almost completely regained its prewar glamor and beauty, but not, as yet, its prices.

Also, of course, there arrived at Cannes the leeches—gamblers, con men, gigolos, budding syndicalists, and plain adventurers; they too had been deprived of their callings, of their chosen way of life, by the years of upheaval. They rushed, as their kind always has, to the spot where people were living easy, free, and in the slight delirium of relaxation that tends to bring incaution.

First there was Irene. Irene was a delight. Then there were three others—I've forgotten their names—all delights. They were displaced by Valérie—English, despite her name. Valérie specialized in just lying on the beach. With Valérie's figure that was enough.

And then there was Anne.

For fifteen years, not a week has passed in which I have not remembered Anne.

I am a married man now. I have two sons, good boys. My wife is a dear and charming woman whom I love with almost all my heart. But a piece of that heart has remained always with Anne. For fifteen years I have remembered and ached, and for the first few I did more than that: I wept. I am six feet two inches tall and I have a broken nose that makes me look a little dangerous, but I wept half the nights of my life during my mid-twenties.

I hope you can forgive a little corn—I feel impelled to corniness. Thing is, only repetition makes clichés, and only profound truths are repeated. With Whittier, I point out that my regret was based on those saddest of words, "It might have been." There was a time, you see, when I think I could have married Anne, but I didn't push it. I can find a dozen excuses for myself—my age, my need to finish college, money, the ambiance of the times—but the excuses have never afforded me solace. Always I have felt that I not only failed to get my heart's delight—by my selfishness I was guilty of destruction. Of murder . . .

Anne was swept into town on a wave of medical students, both American and French, from the Sorbonne. It was a confused, prac-

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tical-joking, somewhat hysterical crowd she traveled with; I understand medical students are often like that, and all such tendencies were heightened in 1947.

Anne wasn't the least like her companions.

She was sitting on the edge of a crowd, a slender girl, obviously American. She had a very slight figure; what there was of it was startlingly swathed in an unusual bathing suit, a vivid green woven with silver. Metallic material like that was almost unknown in the making of bathing suits at that time. She was also wearing a small smile; the conversation didn't deserve more. The boys were discussing who they would plant a cadaver on.

I took a chance. "Do they travel with them?"

"With what?"

"Cadavers."

"Part of the necessary equipment of their lives."

"But—" And then I realized she did not mean of their professional lives but of their juvenility. "You're not one of them?" I asked.

She shook her head; straight brown hair, very simply cut, fanned out in the sun. "I'm *with* them," she said, "but mine is the world of the good old liberal arts."

"And so why are you *with* them?"

"I like them. Perhaps I'm morbid too."

"I don't believe it. What is it you're looking for?"—I should explain that the direct-and-searching question was a "line" with me in 1947. It seemed to intrigue girls. I was too immature to realize that questions about themselves intrigued girls, boys, men, women, and the senile. I thought I had discovered a formula.

It was not a formula to use on Anne, however. The truth of that was the beginning of her attraction for me. My question caused her to focus on me for the first time—a surprisingly penetrating look. She had large, very light eyes, with small pupils. They were her only beauty, but that beauty was reinforced by the contrast the lightness made against her tanned skin, and by the fact that her undistinguished features were set in a thin little face, with a slightly pointed chin.

"I am looking for a husband."

I backed up—mentally and probably physically as well.

She gave me her small smile. "Is that unusual?" she asked.

"Well, no. I suppose not. But—"

"The statement of truth is unusual?"

"Well—yes. I suppose so."

"That is a difference between us," she said. "You suppose things. I know them." She sounded factual, not arrogant. She stood up, gracefully but with no effort wasted, no coquetry expended. "Excuse me," she said and joined the budding doctors.

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A few days later I ran into her again. In the water. It was 6:30 on a Riviera morning, sky clear, air warm, water not too warm, beach almost empty. A delightful time to swim.

My frenzied Australian crawl—fashionably if unscientifically practiced to cause a maximum of froth and fury—had isolated me from everything, even something as near as Anne, until she raised her voice and shouted, "Hi!"

She was five feet away, drenched. Of course, she's drenched, I told myself, and realized that the fact was underlined by her lack of a bathing cap. She was less attractive—a drowned-mouse look. But her eyes seemed even bigger when one saw the smallness and narrowness of her skull.

I stopped flailing and said, "Hi."

"You swim very well, don't you?" Not a comment but a question, it was earnestly delivered.

That earnestness trapped me into honesty. "Not really," I admitted. "Wear myself out—raft and back and I've about had it." I treaded water, gasping for breath, thoroughly surprised at myself.

"Oh."

Was she disappointed? Perhaps she had cast me as an Apollonic hero. I used my formula and veered the subject hastily. "How about you? You don't seem winded and we're quite a way out."

"Oh, I don't swim at all. Not really. I just sort of half float, and do a little bit of sidestroking. I can go practically anywhere but it takes me forever."

"Well, let's go in and talk about forever." I had quite a line in those days.

As she emerged from the water, the same gleaming green-and-silver bathing suit came into view. (I later realized it was the only one she had.) The material shimmered even more when wet. I said, "That's quite a thing, that suit."

There was no nonsense about "this old rag." Anne said, "It should be quite a thing. I had it specially woven. Cost me six months of clothes, practically."

"It's beautiful, but . . ."

"But?"

"Somehow it isn't like you."

She laughed.

When I asked her to have dinner with me that night, she said, "With you? Or on you?"

I gulped and made an unusually adult response. "With me, in a civilized sense."

"Ah." She smiled that grave little smile. "Don't forget that I travel with medical students. If they *had* money they wouldn't be inclined to spend it. They haven't any, so the question doesn't arise. But forgive me."

She looked very nice in street clothes. She looked like something I had almost forgotten existed: a lady. I outdid myself in the choice

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of a restaurant. I couldn't afford it often during three months but one indulgence couldn't ruin ninety days, I told myself . . . until I saw the check. Then I controlled my blink, and reached despondently for my wallet.

Anne made no bones about reading the check. She never made any bones about anything, of course. She studied the upside-down figure and said, "Are you rich?"

"No."

"Then that is a whopper."

"Yes."

"Do you mind?"

And suddenly I didn't. "No," I said. "It was a good meal."

She nodded gravely. "You like to live well. So do I."

"I wouldn't have thought it mattered to you."

"Wouldn't you? Well, you couldn't be more wrong. I like to live well, and that takes money. So"—she smiled—"I want to get married."

"You want to marry money?" I was shocked.

"In a way," she said. "In a way."

I saw her every day and every evening for almost a month. For twenty-six days, to be exact.

During that time we discussed Life, of course. At least, I did. Anne didn't talk much. She listened, and if prodded she sometimes gave an opinion. She was always frank, or seemed so. If she did not want to be frank, she said so.

If you have not yet realized it, she was a most unusual person. Most unusual for a female. Astonishingly unusual for a young female. She said what she meant, meant what she said, knew what she wanted, and tried in a direct way to get it.

"Aren't you wasting your time with me?" I asked her, all humor on the outside, a small ache and a growing confusion on the inside. (I *could* afford to marry. It wouldn't be a snap, but my parents would be happy to indulge an only son who had emerged whole from a nasty war . . . I had never told her that.)

"Probably," Anne said, and didn't miss a step. We were dancing at the Casino at Monte Carlo. She looked virginal and unutterably sweet in a long white gown.

"Let's get off this floor!"

She seemed momentarily surprised, but not disconcerted. She moved gracefully, but with no swinging of hips, to our table.

I sat down with a thump that shook the neighborhood, and demanded, "Don't you believe in love?"

"Certainly I believe in love."

That surprised me. "But—still you want to marry for money?"

"In a way."

"Because you've never been in love?"

"I've been in love."

I was an instant victim of gnawing jealousy. "Who with?"

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"Grammar, grammar, sir. — With a man not unlike you—a poor boy who is an engineering student. He can't afford me now and will never earn a penny. He's a weak man, I know that, but he is —well, somehow suitable. Still, he's not the kind of man who can earn money."

"I am not weak and I can earn money."

"Are you asking me to marry you?"

"No."

"I didn't think you were." But she smiled.

"You wouldn't marry me," I said, still playing with the fire I feared but couldn't seem to get far away from, "if only because I have such a pug-ugly sort of face."

"Ah, that." She didn't deny it, just put her head a little to one side, and examined me. Then she said, "That inclines me toward you."

"How about the fact that I will be a money-maker? Don't you believe it?"

"I do believe it. Entirely. But I want money now. I am twenty-two. I don't want to wait thirteen years. I want these next thirteen years to be full of nights like this—of gaiety and clothes and beautiful things."

"That dress is beautiful."

Her face went totally plain, the only time I ever saw it that way. "This dress," she said, "is cheap and shoddy. If it doesn't look bad that's because I'm twenty-two. It would have looked even better when I was sixteen. But by the time I'm twenty-six, twenty-seven, I won't be able to get away with this sort of off-the-rack cheapness. I'm not beautiful, but I could be. With money. Only with money."

That was the one moment when she looked most unbeautiful.

"Thirteen years," I said. "Why thirteen years? Thirteen and twenty-two—does the age of thirty-five mean something special to you?"

She smiled, and the almost-ugliness went away. "Mean something?" she said gently. "Yes, my dear Bill, it means something. At thirty-five I inherit my father's estate. Very substantial. Quite rich, I'll be. At thirty-five. He left a *very* explicit will when he died—when I was seven years old. The point he made was that women are flighty, foolish, idiotic. I was not to be married for my money. If, at thirty-five, I had still not married, then perhaps it would be best if I were married for my money. His will was unforgivable, but it was not difficult to understand his reasons. My mother *was* flighty and foolish. She ran away with another man. She died before he did, but he never forgave her and he never forgave me.

"He left me to be a ward of the court, and he pleaded posthumously with that court to bring me up 'simply.' Parsimoniously, was what

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he really meant. In my opinion they carried out his will very faithfully. If he were around to have an opinion he would probably feel that they have been extravagant." She paused. "Perhaps he didn't know, perhaps he didn't realize what a monstrous thing he was doing, was creating. Perhaps?"

She took a deep breath. Then she said, "I don't like to talk about it. I'm surprised that I am talking about it. But you're a—nice boy. You see, I want family. I want children, but not if I have to scrape and treat them as my father did not have to but did treat me. And even more than children, I want to belong to someone, to something, to be a part of family. That's easy to understand, too—the sort of common-sense psychology that preceded Freud. I have been alone, always alone. I have a need to belong—a sense of" —she paused, and then said almost violently—"dynasty."

"Dynasty?" I smiled. "Look, Anne, I haven't been entirely frank with you."

"No?" She came with bewilderment out of her absorption, her fixation, and tried to remember who William Dentelle was. "No?" she asked.

"Not exactly. It's true that I'm poor, but—well, I don't really have to be. My parents are pretty well off. And they would help me. Willingly. Until I could earn that money that I know I will earn."

"Oh." She found me then, remembered me. But her reactions weren't what I expected. Her so-clear eyes seemed to cloud, and the small pupils grew even smaller. Then she shook her head—not in dismissal of me, I didn't think, but of some thought, some notion of her own. She said, "You know, you are a very nice young man, Bill. Too nice, in a way." Her eyes left my face and looked over and behind me. "Who is *that?*"

"Who?"

"That man, the handsome man at the bar?"

"Oh, him." And I told her.

Paul—well, I don't remember his last name, probably because he was always called "the Baron." One said, "Paul," "the Baron," or "the Baron Paul." He was undeniably handsome—theatrically so, the sort who was too good-looking to be trusted, and the distrust was justified.

His mother was the queen of some little Balkan country—I've forgotten which. She was a very real queen, a very real Bourbon. His father was a gardener. Not—so the joke went—the *head* gardener. People made gags about Lady Chatterley's lover. The little country went down into the dust, the lady his mother went into the dust, and Paul, like his father, never rose above dirt level. He supported himself, if one can put it that way, openly and explicitly, by paying suit to ladies.

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Something about his openness was disarming. To my surprise and slight shame, and in defiance of my upbringing, I rather liked him.

"I've always wanted to say, 'Not to put too fine a point on it,' and you've finally given me the chance, Anne. Not to put too fine a point on it, he's an outright gigolo. And you've surprised me once again. I don't think you've ever paid much attention to another man. Good manners, you have." I grinned. "Usually."

She didn't take her eyes off the Baron, and my grin faded. "Usually," I said a little sharply. "But I'll admit he is surprisingly good-looking."

She gave a decisive little nod. "Yes, he is. But most of all he is astonishing because he looks exactly like what he is. Even his clothes. That's what made me ask about him. I had never seen 'an outright gigolo' before. Do you know him?"

"The way one does. Around."

"Introduce me, will you?"

She had explained her interest. It seemed harmless. I brought Paul over to the table and performed the introductions.

She married him two weeks later.

I didn't see her during those two weeks, except at a distance. I kept saying to myself, "Dynasty." That funny, unsuitable word she had used to explain her desire in life—I decided that was what she found fascinating in the man she herself had admitted was a blatant example of a low kind.

But she married him.

One week after the marriage they went out in a little boat, and he came back alone.

Two days later they arrested him. The medical students had set up a clamor, and the police—although very anxious not to get involved with Americans, which is all Anne spelled to them, very anxious to let Cannes reestablish itself as the playground of the world, very anxious to avoid any but the happiest of publicity, very anxious to deny that such types as Paul ever, *ever* put a foot in their paradise—the police gave in and arrested him.

Then, because he was so damned inept, they had no choice but to hold him for trial. To the question of where his wife had disappeared to, he said, "She got out and swam away." And he stuck to that idiocy. It was his whole defense.

After talking to me the prosecution asked, not as a legal command but as a favor, if I would remain for the trial. They seemed to feel I would be helpful. I didn't understand that until the trial. Then I could see how I was helpful, very helpful.

The *cour d'assises* would not sit for two months. Then they would hold court farther up the shore, in

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Nice, which is the prefecture of the canton of the Alpes-Maritimes.

So my three idyllic months on the fabulous Riviera stretched to five bitter ones . . .

A French courtroom is fancily confusing. I had to be guided to my place; I took a long time spotting the accused; I took a longer time accustoming myself to acceptance of the fact that he was considered guilty until he had proved otherwise.

Once I did get accustomed to it, I took a great pleasure in it.

The testimony was totally damning. All of it, including the Baron's. And he was left without a shred of dignity—not that he had much to start with, but he made a surprisingly good try for it at that trial. Still, out came the illegitimacy of his birth. Everybody knew it, of course, but in a whispering sort of way, and he had a passport that clouded the facts.

And out came his age. When had this little Balkan country vanished? 1915. And how old was he at the time? Small bits of history piled up to push him to the truth: he was fifteen. So his passport had been falsified; the man who looked thirty-four and admitted to thirty-seven was forty-seven—and the admission meant more to him than to other men. Youthfulness was one of his stocks in trade.

And why did he marry this twenty-two-year-old? He flabbergasted everyone with the truth: he married her for her money. Ah, then he didn't know that she would have no money for thirteen years? "Not," said the prosecuting attorney nastily (he was given to nastiness), "until you reach the very edge of the age of sixty?"

"She didn't tell me that."

I remember that the defense attorney gasped helplessly.

"So you married her for her money, discovered you weren't going to get it for thirteen years, and so decided you would collect it by inheritance?"

"I married her because she asked me to, because she was a nice person, and because she said she was rich. Until I entered this court I did not know anything about this 'thirteen years.' She said she had transferred money but that French banks are slow. Which they are. We had only a week of marriage."

"A week. Only a week," the prosecuting attorney said, slowly and bitterly, and sat down.

I was eventually guided to the stand, where I stood, hanging on, shaking with pain, loss, and rage. Did I want an interpreter? I was asked, and I said no, although my French wasn't really sufficient. But I didn't want anything clouding the air between me and vengeance.

My main value to the prosecution, I realized later, was my passion of love and regret. Through my eyes the judges saw how simple, how direct, how young, how eager for life she was. Through

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my loving eyes they saw how lovable she was.

They also got some facts.

"You went swimming with the Baroness?"

"Often."

"She swam well?"

"Not at all well. Very badly."

"You discussed money with the Baroness?"

"Yes."

"She led you to believe she was in possession of her estate? Of the considerable assets—bank accounts, company stocks, bonds, et cetera—that were read out and entered as evidence?"

"She did not."

"She told you the contrary?"

"She told me, explicitly and in detail, that she could not touch any of her money until she reached the age of thirty-five."

"And yet you were in a similar relationship to her as the accused later was? That is, the question of marriage arose between you?"

"It arose between us. It was then that she explained she had very little; she lived 'parsimoniously'—that was the word she used."

The defense tackled me briefly, and was sorry.

"You said you went swimming with the deceased?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, she *could* swim, could she not?"

"Certainly. She swam like an infant poodle, half on her back, with one paw waving."

"A little less rhetoric, Monsieur Dentelle, and a little more fact."

"That was fact."

"Another fact is that you discussed marriage with the lady?"

"We talked around it."

"What does that mean?"

"What it says."

"It does not say anything in French. I put it to you that you asked her to marry you, she refused, she then decided to marry another man, a far handsomer man. Perhaps she told you just that and you do not feel a kindness toward the accused as a result?"

"I did not actually ask her to marry me, and so she did not refuse. I think if I had asked her she might have accepted. And the only comment she ever made to me regarding the man she married was he looked exactly like a gigolo."

The defense excused me abruptly.

Paul's lawyers had only a few forlorn little points to play with, and one powerful fact.

They tried first to play on the point that Anne's estate was not hers to will, that her father had entailed it. On her death, they reminded the court, the money would go to some woman in the States, a distant cousin of Anne's. (The will had been read droningly aloud, and then droningly translated. I had noted bitterly that the woman in the States inherited directly. Either she was well over thirty-five or Anne's father's en-

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mity had not stretched to her.) Now, said the defense, what man would commit murder without even bothering to find out that he wouldn't inherit? —And the answer was too obvious to avoid: Paul had admittedly married for money that was untouchable, and he hadn't bothered to find *that* out. He was simply a foolish man.

Who would drop someone overboard and then say she swam away? . . . He was simply a foolish man.

All right, they said, where's the body?

That one caused the usual fuss. The corpus-delicti business is often tossed around, but it has never really been resolved. Men have been found guilty of murder although no body was produced, and anyway, the term is misunderstood. "Corpus delicti" does not, in law, mean the physical body of the victim of a murder. It means the fundamental facts necessary to the commission of a crime. The prosecution claimed they had that, and then some.

But they weren't stuck with it because in mid-trial a part of the body showed up.

Doctors were then paraded to and from the witness stand. Those called by the defense said the body was too long dead to be the body of the Baroness. Those called by the prosecution said the body was too long in the water to be able to say how long it was dead.

And the prosecution simply pointed out that the pathetic remnants were clothed in shreds of Anne's bathing suit. And nobody —the defense, the prosecution, Paul, or me—denied that that bit of silvery green was not from Anne's bathing suit.

The Baron Paul was hanged.

The Chief of Police nodded at me. "And you came home," he said, "and then you got married and had two sons and remembered the young lady in the green suit with the light eyes. It's a very interesting tale, Mr. Dentelle. Sad. But—forgive me—so what?"

"So," I said, "an hour ago, as I was walking from the hotel toward that roadside place where they serve the charcoal-grilled steaks—"

"The Bluebell Inn. On Long Lane."

"Yes. As I was walking along, before I reached the end of the main street that has the two traffic lights, a plum-colored Mercedes-Benz, chauffeur-driven, drew up beside me to wait for the light—"

"I know the car." He nodded. "Naturally. Only thing like it in town. Belongs to the people who own the mill."

Why didn't he put a name to the main street, I wondered impatiently, since he was such a glutton for detail? But . . . "Own the mill?" I repeated. "I've dealt with it for years but never thought of it as be-

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ing 'owned.' It's a monster of an operation. Isn't it a public stock company?"

"Uh-huh. Family held. But he isn't an executive type. They travel. Rarely here. Some say he's a nice boss, and some say he's just a bad businessman and has the sense to know it . . . As I said, so what?"

"So in the back seat of that plum-colored car was Anne."

The chief took his weight off his elbows. "You," he said slowly, "*are* nuts. Most likely, the lady in the back was Mrs. Frauenfeld."

"It was Anne. The brown hair is silvery now—it can't be her age, but however false, it looks good. She is very beautiful and very cold-looking."

He was still looking at me as if I were totally insane. He said, "Thirty-five? Thirty-six?"

"She is thirty-seven now, but she looks older."

"Mrs. Frauenfeld does give an impression of being—well, 'beautifully preserved.' Odd, since she's pretty young."

"Frauenfeld?"

"I *told* you—"

"Frauenfeld. Wait." I frowned, and then it came. "That was the name of the distant cousin. It was read out in court. That was the name of the distant cousin who inherited. But—it was a woman."

"His first name is Marion."

"Ah. Yes, that was it."

"Something is funny, Mr. Dentelle?"

"Was I smiling? Well, it depends on one's sense of humor. I was wondering if Anne took that feminine-sounding name into her careful account, and I decided it was not impossible. Because I also was remembering that unusual but not very suitable bathing suit. Only thing I ever saw on her that wasn't understated. Cost her several months' clothes, she told me."

He stared at me for one of his long minutes. Then he said, "You are *sure,* Mr. Dentelle?"

"Absolutely sure. Older, colder, more beautiful. Same eyes."

He said slowly, "I noticed Mrs. Frauenfeld's eyes at a charity affair once. She handed me a cup of punch. She was very charming, very gracious. But I wondered if she took dope."

"I don't think so. Pinpointed with total determination, that's all. That may make medical nonsense, but it's what I always thought."

He looked at the clock behind me on the wall. He looked at the telephone on his table. Then he looked at me. He said, without expression, "Not a heck of a lot is known about the Frauenfelds. Perhaps because there is no one of their social level in town. There is a rumor—women's gossip, I'm sure—that she is 'no better than she should be,' as my mother would have said. Lives her own life, the ladies suggest. Doesn't respect her husband. But then he isn't a strong man. Has a weak chin. Pointy.

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One thing I do know—he is a mining engineer. Like you."

"Like me and the man she loved—who was no businessman and would never be rich, who was 'weak, but somehow suitable.' Has a pointed chin, huh? Like his wife and cousin? . . . 'Dynasty,' she said. Maybe she had some idea that to marry the only relative she had would make for a kind of dynasty, and keep the money in the family."

His hand moved slowly toward the telephone, arrived, and stayed there, motionless. He said, apparently to himself, "Not only her, but him. Accessory . . . So what you're saying is this: she couldn't inherit for thirteen years. But if she 'died,' her cousin—the man she was in love with—would inherit. So she arranges 'to be murdered,' her cousin inherits, she marries him, and has the money right away . . . There are details to check, to confirm—wills, birth certificates, marriage certificates, that part of a body in shreds of the green bathing suit. And"—he looked at me—"slowness, sureness, silence—until we reach certainty. Will you join me in these precautions, Mr. Dentelle?"

"Yes."

"The state's attorney," he said musingly. "Too big for me." He still held the phone, thinking it out. "Will you come back when we need you, Mr. Dentelle?"

"I'll wait around."

He looked dubious. "At least two weeks. Might be much more."

"I waited on the Riviera for two months."

He looked at me curiously. "You feel—vengeful?"

Did I? I said slowly, "Less so every minute. At first I felt sorry for the weeks of agony suffered by the young William Dentelle, and then for his years of pain-filled, regret-filled nights. But now I am thinking only of simple justice. I feel that you and I must ride off and see justice done. For Paul's sake. As I told Anne, he was really a likeable guy, and honest according to his peculiar lights."

"Um. Well, you know, so was she. And I think you might also experience some thankfulness."

"For what?"

"Despite the fact that your face might have had a suitable effect on a jury, your parents were unsuitably well-to-do. You lacked motive to kill her, and motive to murder her was one of the qualifications for marriage."

He watched realization dawn on me, smiled, and then became businesslike. "Do you, Mr. Dentelle, wish formally to charge that you believe murder was done to one Baron Paul—we must get that last name—that murder was done to one Baron Paul Something, in the city of Cannes, France, in the year nineteen hundred and forty-seven?"

"I do."

He took the phone off the hook.

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A powerful story—one of the most powerful we've published in some time . . . a memorable story . . . a story that anthologists will be reprinting for years to come . . . a story which marks, we think, a turning point in Mr. Hoch's writing career . . .

I'D KNOW YOU ANYWHERE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

16 November 1942

From the top of the dune there was nothing to be seen in any direction—nothing but the unchanging, everchanging sameness of the African desert. Contrell wiped the sweat-caked sand from his face and signaled the others to advance. The tank, a sick sad monster wanting only to be left to die, ground slowly into life, throwing twin fountains of sand from the path of its tracks.

"See anything?" Grove asked, coming up behind him.

"Nothing. No Germans, no Italians, not even any Arabs."

Willy Grove unslung the carbine from his shoulder. "They should be here. Our planes spotted them heading this way."

Contrell grunted. "With old Bertha in the shape she is, we'd be better off not running into them. Six men and a battered old tank against the pride of Rommel's Afrika Korps."

"But they're retreating and we're not, remember. They just might be all set to surrender."

"Sure they might," Contrell agreed uncertainly. He'd known Willy Grove—his full name was an impossible Willoughby McSwing Grove—for only a month, since they'd been thrown together shortly before the North African invasion. His first impression had been of a man like himself, drafted in his early twenties into an impossible war that threatened to envelop them all in blood and flame. But as the weeks passed, another Willy Grove had gradually become evident, one that stood next to him now, peering down into the empty, sand-swept valley before them.

"Damn! Where are they, anyway?"

"You sound like you're ready for a battle. Hell, if I saw them coming I think I'd run the other way." Contrell took out the remains of a battered and almost empty pack of cigarettes. "A sand dune on the Tunisia border is no place for a couple of corporals."

Grove squatted down on his haunches, resting the carbine lightly against his knee. "You're right

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there—about the corporal part, anyway. You know, I been thinking the last few weeks—if I get back to the states in one piece I'm going to go to OCS and become an officer."

"You found yourself a home."

"Go on, laugh. There's worse things a guy could do for a living."

"Sure. He could rob banks. What in hell do army officers do when there's no war around?"

Willy Grove thought about that. "Don't you worry. There's goin' to be a war around for a good long time, maybe the rest of our lives."

"Think Hitler will last that long?"

"Hitler, Stalin, the Japs. It'll be somebody, don't you worry."

Contrell took another drag on his cigarette, then suddenly came to sharp attention. There was something moving at the top of one of the dunes, something . . . "Look!"

Grove brought up his binoculars. "Damn! It's them, all right. The whole stinkin' German army."

Contrell dropped his cigarette and went sliding down the dune to tell the others. The officer in charge was a paste-colored Captain who rode the dying tank as if it were his grave. He looked down as Contrell spoke and then spoke a sharp order. "We'll take Bertha up the dune and let them see us. They might think we've got lots more and call it quits.."

"Sure. Sir." And then again, Contrell thought, they just might blast the hell out of you.

By the time the wounded steel monster had been moved into position, the first of the three German tanks was within firing range. Contrell watched the big guns coming to bear on each other—two useless giants able only to destroy. He wondered what the world would be like if guns had the power to rebuild too. But he had little time to think about that or anything else before the German gun recoiled in a flash of power, followed an instant later by the thud of the sound wave reaching them. A blossom of sand and smoke filled the air to their left as the shell went wide of its mark.

"Hit the ground!" Grove yelled. "They've got us zeroed in!"

Old Bertha returned the fire, scoring a lucky near-miss on the nearest tank, but the odds and the firepower were all against her. The German's second shell hit the left tread, the third slammed into the turret, and Bertha was as good as dead. Someone screamed—Contrell thought it might have been the Captain.

Grove was stretched out on the sand a dozen feet away. "Damn things are iron coffins," he said, gasping at the odor of burning flesh.

Contrell started to get up. "Did any of them get out?"

"Not a one. Stay down! They're coming this way."

"God!" It was a prayer on Contrell's lips. "What'll we do?"

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"Just don't move. I'll get us out of this somehow."

Two of the enemy tanks remained in the distance, while the third one—basking in its kill—moved closer. Two German solders were riding on its rear, and they hopped down to run ahead. One carried a rifle, the other what looked like a machine pistol to Contrell. He tensed his body for the expected shots, his face nearly buried in the sand.

The German tank commander appeared in the turret and shouted something. The soldier with the machine pistol turned—and suddenly Willy Grove was on his feet. His carbine chattered like a machine gun, cutting down the German from behind. With his left hand he hurled a grenade in the direction of the tank, then threw himself at the second German before the man could bring up his rifle.

The grenade exploded near enough to knock the officer out of action, and Contrell moved. He ran in a crouch to the German vehicle, aware that Grove was right behind him. "I got 'em both," Willy shouted. "Stay down!" He pulled the dying officer from the top of the tank and fired a burst with his carbine into the interior. He clambered up, swinging the .50-caliber machine-gun around.

"Hold it!" Contrell shouted. "They're surrendering!"

They were indeed. The crews of the other two tanks were leaving their vehicles, coming forward across the sand, arms held high.

"Guess they had enough war," Grove said, training the machine gun on them.

"Haven't we all?"

Grove waited until the eight men were within a hundred feet, then his finger tightened on the trigger and a burst of sudden bullets sprayed the area. The Germans looked startled, tried to turn and run, and died like that, on their feet.

"What the hell did you do that for?" Contrell shouted, climbing up to Grove's side. "They were surrendering!"

"Maybe. Maybe not. They might have had grenades hidden under their arms or something. Can't take chances."

"Are you nuts or something, Grove?"

"I'm alive, that's the important thing." Grove jumped down, hitting the sand with an easy, sure movement. "We tell the right kind of story, boy, and we'll both end up with medals."

"You killed them!"

"That's what you do in war," Grove said sadly. "You kill them and collect the medals."

30 November 1950

Korea was a land of hills and ridges, a country poor for farming

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and impossible for fighting. Captain Contrell had viewed it for the first time with a mixture of resignation and despair, picturing in his mind only the ease with which an entire company of his men could be obliterated without a chance by an army more familiar with the land.

Now, as November ended with the easy victories of autumn turning to the bitter ashes of winter, he had reason to remember those first impressions. The Chinese had entered the war, and every hour fresh reports came from all around the valley of the Chongchon, indicating that their numbers could be counted not in the thousands but in the hundreds of thousands. The word on everyone's mind, but on no one's lips, was "retreat."

"They'll drive us into the sea, Captain," one of his sergeants told Contrell.

"Enough of that talk. Get the men together in case we have to pull out fast. Check Hill 314."

The hills were so numerous and anonymous that they'd been numbered according to their height. They were only places to die, and one looked much like another to the men at the guns.

Some tanks, muddy and caked with frost, rolled through the morning mists, heading back. Contrell stepped in front of the leading vehicle and waved it down. He saw now that it was actually a Boffers twin 40-mm. self-propelled mount, an antiaircraft weapon that was being effectively used as infantry support. From a distance in the mist it had looked like a tank, and for all practical purposes it was one.

"What the hell's wrong, Captain?" a voice shouted down at him.

"Can you carry some men back with you?"

The officer jumped down, and something in the movement brought back to Contrell a sudden memory of a desert scene eight years earlier. "Willy Grove! I'll be damned!"

Grove blinked quickly, seeming to focus his eyes, and Contrell saw from the collar insignia that he was now a major. "Well. Contrell, wasn't it? Good to see you again."

"It's a long way from Africa, Willy."

"Damn sight colder, I know that. Thought you were getting out after the war."

"I was out for three weeks and couldn't stand it. I guess this army life gets to you after a while. How are things up ahead?"

Grove twisted his face into a grimace. "If they were any damned good, you think we'd be heading this way?"

"You're going back through the Pass?"

"It's the only route left. I hear the Chinese have got it just about cut off too."

"Can we ride on top your vehicles?"

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Grove gave a short chuckle. "Sure. You can catch the grenades and toss them back." He patted the .45 at his side as if it were his wallet. "Climb aboard."

Contrell issued a sharp order to his sergeant and waited until most of his few scattered forces had found handholds on the vehicles. Then he climbed aboard Major Grove's "tank" himself. Already in the morning's distance they could hear the insane bugle calls that usually meant another Chinese advance. "The trap is closing," he said.

Grove nodded. "It's like I told you once before. The fighting never stops. Never figured back then that we'd be fighting the Chinese, though."

"You don't like fighting Chinese?"

The major shrugged. "Makes no difference. They die just like anyone else. Easier, when they're high on that stuff they smoke."

The column rolled into the Pass, the only route that remained open to the south. But almost at once they realized that the hills and wooded stretches on either side of the roads were filled with the waiting enemy. Contrell looked back and saw his sergeant topple over to the ground, cut through the middle by a burst from a hidden machine gun. Ahead of them, a truckload of troops was stalled across the road, afire. Grove lifted himself up for a better view.

"Can we get around them?" Contrell asked, breathing hard.

"Around them or through them."

"They're South Koreans."

Those still alive and able to run were scrambling off the burning truck, running toward Grove's vehicle. "Get off!" Grove shouted. "Keep back!" He reached down and shoved one of the South Koreans over backward, into the roadside dust. When another clambered aboard in his place, Grove carefully took out his .45 pistol and put a bullet through the man's head.

Contrell watched it all as if he were seeing an old movie unwinding after years of forgotten decay. I've been here before, he thought, thinking in the same breath of the medals they'd shared after the North African episode. Men like Grove never changed—at least, not for the better.

"They were South Koreans, Willy," he said quietly, his mouth close to the major's ear.

"What the hell do I care? They think I'm running a damned bus service?"

Nothing more was said about it until they'd rumbled south into the midst of the retreating American army. Contrell wondered where it would all stop, the retreat. At the sea, or Tokyo—or California?

They took time for a smoke, and Contrell said, "You didn't have to kill that Gook, Willy."

"No? What was I supposed to do, let them all climb aboard and get

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us all killed? Go on, report it if you want to. I know my military law and I know my moral law. It's like the overcrowded lifeboat."

"I think you just like to kill."

"What soldier doesn't?"

"Me."

"Hell! Then what'd you re-up for? Fun and games?"

"I thought I might do something to keep the world at peace."

"Only way to keep the world at peace is to kill all the troublemakers."

"That Gook back there was a troublemaker?"

"To me he was. Just then."

"But you enjoyed it. I could almost see it in your face. It was like North Africa all over again."

Major Grove turned away, averting his face. "I got a medal for North Africa, buddy. It helped me become a major."

Contrell nodded sadly. "They do give medals for killing. And I guess sometimes they don't ask for too many details."

Someone called an order and Grove stubbed out the cigarette. "Come on, boy. Don't brood over it. We're moving on."

Contrell nodded and followed him. Once, just once, he looked back the way they'd come . . .

24 August 1961

Major Contrell had been in Berlin only three hours when he heard Willy Grove's name mentioned in a barside conversation at the Officers' Club. The speaker was a slightly drunk captain who liked to sound as if he'd been defending Berlin from the Russians single-handed since the war.

"Grove," he said with a little bit of awe in his voice. "Colonel Willoughby McSwing Grove. That's his name! They say he'll make general before the year is out. If you coulda seen the way he stood up to those Russians last week, if you coulda seen it!"

"I'd heard he was in Berlin," Contrell said noncommittally. "I know him from the old days."

"Korea?"

Contrell nodded. "And North Africa nearly twenty years ago. When we were all a lot younger."

"I didn't know he fought in World War II."

"That was before we were officers."

The captain snorted. "It's hard to imagine old Grove before he was an officer. You shoulda seen him last week—he stood there, watching them put up that damned wall, and pretty soon he walked right up to the line. This Russian officer was there too, and they stood like that, only inches apart, just like they were daring each other to make a move. Pretty soon the Russian turned his back and walked away, and damned if old Grove didn't take out his .45! We all thought for a minute he was going to blast that

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Commie down in his track, and I think we'd all have been with him if he did. You know, you go through this business long enough —this building up and relaxing of tensions—and after a while you just wish somebody like Colonel Grove would pull a trigger or push a button and get us down to the business once and for all."

"The business of killing?"

"What else is there, for a soldier?"

Contrell downed his drink without answering. Instead, he asked, "Where is Grove staying? Is he married now?"

"If he is, there's no sign of a wife. He lives in the BOQ over at the air base."

"Thanks." Contrell laid a wrinkled bill on the bar. "The drinks were on me. I enjoyed our conversation."

He found Colonel Grove after another hour's searching, not at his quarters but at the office overlooking the main thoroughfare of West Berlin. His hair was a bit whiter, his manner a bit more brisk, but it was still the same Willy Grove. A man in his forties. A soldier.

"Contrell! Welcome to Berlin! I heard you were being assigned here."

They shook hands like old friends, and Contrell said, "I understand you've got the situation pretty well in hand over here."

"I did have until they started building that damned wall last week. I almost shot a Russian officer."

"I heard. Why didn't you?"

Colonel Grove smiled. "You know me better than to expect lies, Major. We've been through some things together. You're the one who always said I had a weakness for killing."

"Weakness isn't exactly the word for it."

"Well, whatever. Anyway, you probably know better than anyone else my feelings at that moment. But I kept them under control. There's talk of making me a general, boy, and I'm keeping my nose clean these days. No controversy."

"And I'm still a major. Guess I don't live right."

"You don't have the killer instinct, Contrell. Never did have it."

Major Contrell lit a cigarette, very carefully. "I don't think a soldier needs to have a killer instinct these days, Willy. But then, we've been debating this same question for nearly twenty years now, off and on."

"Haven't we, though." Willy Grove smiled. "I'm sorry I don't have somebody I can kill for you this time."

"What would you have ever done in civilian life, Willy?"

"I don't know. Never thought about it much."

"A hundred years ago you'd have been a Western gunman probably. Or forty years ago, a Chicago bootlegger with a tommy gun.

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Now there's just the army left to you."

Grove's smile hardened, but he didn't lose it. Instead, he rose from behind the desk and walked over to the window. Looking down at the busy street, he said, "Maybe you're right, I really don't know. I do know that I've killed fifty-two men so far in my lifetime, which is a pretty good average. Most of them I looked right in the eye before I shot them. A few others got it in the back, like that Russian nearly did last week."

"You could have started a war."

"Yes. And some day perhaps I will. If I had the power to . . ." He let the sentence go unfinished.

"They're not all like you," Contrell said. "Thank God."

"But I have enough of them on my side. Enough of them who know that army means war and war means death. You can't escape it, no matter how hard you try."

He looked at the white-haired colonel and remembered the captain he'd spoken with in the bar earlier that afternoon. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps he was the one who was wrong. Had he wasted away his whole life pursuing an impossible dream of an army without war or killing?

"I'll still do it my way," he said.

"Good luck, Major."

A week later Contrell heard that a Russian guard had been killed at the wall in an exchange of gunfire with West Berlin police. One story had it that an American officer had fired the fatal shot personally, but Contrell was unable to verify this rumor.

5 April 1969

It was the day before Easter in Washington, a city expectant under a warm spring sun. The corridors of the Pentagon were more deserted than usual for a Saturday, and only in one office on the west side was there any activity. General Willoughby McSwing Grove, newly appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was moving into his suite of offices.

Colonel Contrell found him bent over a desk drawer, distributing the contents of a bulging brief case to their proper places. He looked up, a bit surprised, at his Saturday visitor. "Well . . . Contrell, isn't it? Haven't seen you in years. Colonel? You're coming along."

"Not as fast as you, General."

Grove smiled a bit, accepting the comment as a sort of congratulation. "I'm at the top now. Good place to be for a man of my age. The hair's all white, but I feel good. Do I look the same, Colonel?"

"I'd know you anywhere, General."

"There's a lot to be done, a damned lot. I've waited and worked all my life for this spot, and now I've got it. Our new President has promised me free

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reins in dealing with the international situation."

"I thought he would," Contrell said quietly. "Do you have any plans yet?"

"I've had plans all my life." He wheeled around in his swivel chair and stared hard out the window at the distant city. "I'm going to show them what an army is for."

Colonel Contrell cleared his throat. "You know, Willy, it took the better part of a lifetime, but you finally convinced me that killing can be necessary at times."

"Well, I'm pleased to know that you've come around to . . ." General Grove started to turn back in his chair and Contrell shot him once in the left temple.

For a time after he'd done it, Contrell stood staring at the body, hardly aware that the weight of the gun had slipped from his fingers. There was only one thought that crowded all the others from his mind. How would he ever explain it all at the court-martial?

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